Rugby Union Five Nations Championship: France 24 England 17

England frailties exposed

Robert Armstrong at Stade de France

ENGLAND's fragile pretensions to the total rugby espoused by their coach Clive Woodward were blown apart here by a creative France side who should now stride away with a second successive Grand Slam.

Fears that it was a revolution in style which England were ill-equipped to carry through proved well founded: far from being new-age rugby it was a familiar story of French artists versus English artisans.

This defeat, the fourth in a row at the hands of *Les Tricolores*, represents a demoralising setback for England, who might have conceded six tries instead of only two by the wings Philippe Bernat-Salles and Christophe Dominici.

England were outclassed and outgunned, often losing the ball in contact, and were wholly inept in defence where the insouciant French were allowed to roam fancy-free. The folly of taking on France at the fast-moving game that has been their speciality for decades was brutally exposed: Lawrence Dallaglio's jaded players were leaden-footed, predictable and devoid of consistent organisation.

No one should derive an ounce of comfort from the scoreline; the multi-skilled French, who led 15-3 at half-time, ought to have won at a canter instead of giving England reason to believe they were in with a shout.



Lone effort . . . England's Grayson fails to check a French charge PHOTOGRAPH: VINCENT AMALVY

Suddenly it has become imperative that England defeat Wales in the championship game at Twickenham on February 21. Yet on the latest evidence the Welsh, who beat Italy 23-20 in their international at Llanelli, must have a chance of giving their hosts a lesson in continuity and finishing: poor decision-making, lack of pace, and dodgy handling all contributed to England's downfall.

The biggest surprise was their lack of punch in their traditional areas of strength up front, where they always struggled to win possession. The front row creaked and all but crumbled at several scrums: the normally abrasive Martin Johnson and Garath Archer found it difficult to impose themselves in the line-out, and in a one-sided first half the back row was subjected to a fearful pounding which opened the way for France's tries.

"It would have been a travesty if we had won, though I thought we did get better in the second half," Woodward said.

England have now gone seven games without a win, their worst sequence on record. The pressure to stop the rot may force Woodward into the sort of sweeping changes he carried out in November when his side failed to impress against Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

No England player can feel sure of his place, but the team can salvage a Triple Crown provided Woodward reshapes the pack, selects a specialist full-back and calls up a flier on the left wing.

As for France, a bright new morning has dawned, opening up a credible challenge for next year's World Cup that would have been unthinkable last November when they were annihilated by the Springboks.

"We had excellent motivation and I was pleased we got our tactics right," said Raphael Ibanez, their influential new hooker and captain. "Our defence was good, but we won't be complacent after this win."

Thomas Castaignède, targeted by Saracens last summer, was the catalyst of France's devastating midfield attacks which time and again got behind England's dozy defence. And the French coped admirably with the loss through injury of their back-row forwards Philippe Benetton and Thomas Lièvremont, even stepping up the tempo in the final quarter when England briefly looked like making waves.

In effect England lost the match in the opening 20 minutes when the France wings were unstoppable; in the second half Castaignède and Jean-Luc Sadourny weighed in with a marvellous drop goal each, and Christophe Lamaison kicked a second penalty.

England, whose frantic pressure after the interval yielded a push-over try for Neil Back, their best player on the day, twice closed to within four points of the French, who were thwarted close to the line partly through carelessness, and partly through bizarre refereeing by Ireland's David McHugh.

It was difficult to judge the form of Jeremy Guscott because he rarely received a decent pass in space. Paul Grayson, too, was badly served because the pack consistently failed to deliver.

England's handful of enterprising ideas were mostly stillborn. It was another bad day at the office and further proof that Dallaglio's men have a mountain to climb.

Ireland 16 Scotland 17

Ireland fall to Chalmers offensive

Ian Malin in Dublin

GENEROUS hosts the Irish, generous to a fault. And so it was that the glazed-eyed men in kilts wandering the streets of Dublin in the early hours of Sunday morning wore the look of lottery winners who had forgotten they had even bought tickets. For this was a game stolen from Ireland's back pockets.

If Scotland's supporters were up in the air, however, their players and management were making sure no heads were in clouds, even though two years ago Scotland, after a similarly moribund autumn, came to Lansdowne Road, won in a hurricane and continued their Five Nations campaign with an unexpected and exhilarating win over the French at Murrayfield.

It would be fanciful to suggest that their pocket-sized pack can survive against the mighty eight of the Grand Slam champions on February 21.

Jim Telfer, Scotland's coach, said: "Just like the A team the night before, we showed a lot of guts in defence. Whether we beat France or not is another question, but at least this gives us something to build on."

Telfer's new captain, Gary Armstrong, was voted Man of the Match. Telfer was also grateful that the nerve of Armstrong's half-back partner Craig Chalmers, scorer of the two decisive penalties in the last 15 minutes, held out.

The match was a dire advertisement for northern hemisphere rugby. It had its drama but was littered with mistakes and breathtaking naivety by the Irish.

Ireland miss their Lions lock Jeremy Davidson, but the real vacuum was in their midfield, where the penetration and guile of the injured centres Rob Henderson and Jonathan Bell was sorely lacking.

At fly-half, David Humphreys had a wretched match and for the next month that annual debate about whether Eric Elwood should return will rage again.

Humphreys did kick 11 points, including a well-taken drop goal, to give Ireland a 16-11 lead after 53 minutes, but his kicking from hand and his drop-outs were just two of the basic errors on view.

Irish coach Brian Ashton chose Humphreys and his half-back partner Brian O'Meara specifically to provide the bullets to fire the back line, but neither performed and in the midfield Mark McCall and Kevin Maggs failed to spark.

Ireland had a series of seven scrums close to the Scotland line. The Scottish front row was creaking with George Graham, on the loose head, given a torrid time by Paul Wallace. Graham was substituted and the Scots clung on to counter-attack and set up the platform for those winning Chalmers kicks.

Cryptic crossword by Araucaria

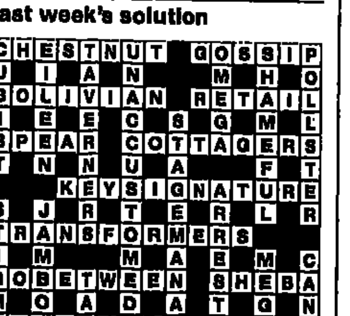
Across

1 Moderately good melody with cat interrupting its playing (4,2,8)
9 Artist is in shock: assessment required (9)
10 A heater? Two, joining at the centre (5)
11 Rendering of the "hallo" suggests goodbye (5)
12 Anti-monarchist action on 25 18 (9)
13 Letter reaches the border on time; won't last long (8)
14 Sudden attack unfinished: he's happy (6)
17 Pointed growth on head in some types (6)
19 11 piece of horsemanship during ablutions (8)
22 A person, then? Acknowledgment's optional (3,1,5)
24 This is always part of the fibre (5)
25 Uncommon generous? (5)
26 Square for action on 21 18 (9)
27 Hobnobbing for a tanner: is it possible? (14)

Down

1 ADC to get wearied with place-holder, perhaps (4-10)
2 Charge British constituencies have since 1948 (7)
3 He deals with winds on an island (9)
4 Slaughter of a lot of people with some land (8)
5 Sweet girl I clued wrongly (6)
6 Words for the seriously rich (5)
7 Agree to nothing but change of course (2,5)
8 Supposedly dumb actors on sufferance? (6,8)
15 Climber holds French agreements to purchase (9)
16 Live Hillerite outside Ghana in Libya (8)
18 Person in charge to be right for the tenth time? (7)
20 Fool, say, with excellent weapon (7)
21 Bearing a grudge at beer . . . (6)
23 . . . for the Council at Burton? (5)

Last week's solution



C	H	E	S	T	N	U	T		G	O	S	S	I	P
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B	O	L	I	V	I	A	N		R	E	T	A	I	L
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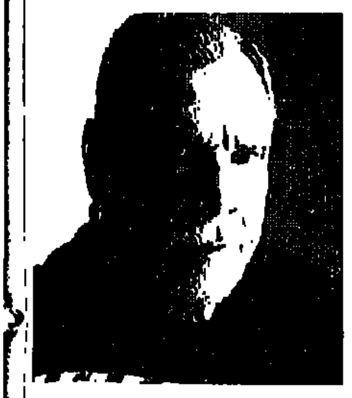
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Inside:
*Offshore***Money**
an 8-page supplement

The Guardian Weekly
Vol 158, No 8
Week ending February 22, 1998

Maggie O'Kane in Baghdad meets those who suffered through one attack and now await another

Iraq under the shadow of the bomb



ON HIS table lies an old yellowing English book, The Complete Guide To Letter Writing, the remains of the previous night's dinner and an Iraqi mandolin that he is teaching himself to play to pass the days.

Before the Gulf war, he was an accountant with the Iraqi Oil Company, with five children, a smattering of English and a large house near a bomb shelter.

Now Abu Ziad (above) lives behind drawn curtains in a grubby suburb of Baghdad. His neighbours look after him cook his dinners and send glasses of orange juice for his occasional guest. Sometimes he washes and shaves, mostly he does not, and once a month, for the past seven years, he has injected himself with Modecate — an anti-depressant drug.

He was a shy young man who married when he was aged 38. Haifa was aged 23 and pretty. Their children came quickly: Ziad, Zena, Fuad, Lena and Sadaad. During the Iran-Iraq war, when nearly 1 million young men died on each side, he remembers the sounds of women wailing in the night for another lost son, husband or lover.

He remembers thanking God that he married late, and that his children were too young to be sent to fight. Then, three years after that war, President Saddam Hussein led Iraqis into another.

At 2am on February 13, 1991, two bombs hit the Amiryia bomb shelter near his home. The first was a drilling bomb that pierced the roof, slicing into the central heating tank and sending gallons of boiling water pouring over the women and children below, who were playing dominoes and watching Tom and Jerry cartoons dubbed into Arabic.

The second bomb, 15 minutes later, exploded with such force that he never had the chance to identify the bodies of his wife and four of their five children.

He remembers standing outside the shelter and noticing the ankles of the dead women and children marked by burns as they had fought to escape from the shelter.

He does not know if war will come again, and does not seem to care. "I do not want more victims to be added, or for history to repeat itself," he says. "Personally, I don't fear anything."



Girls pray at the Amiryia bomb shelter in Baghdad where more than 400 civilians died PHOTO: ENRIC MARTI

Seven months ago his first grandson was born to his only surviving child, Zind. He named the boy Fuad, after his dead son. "It's only them I'm worried about," he says. "For myself, whether I'm dead or alive, it's the same for me."

The sun is shining in Baghdad and there is calm. In the Bilat el Shuhaddaa primary school, the headmaster, Abdul al-Hussein, says he will not close the school if war breaks out. He is fluent in Saddam-speak.

"The Arab Ba'ath Socialist party in Iraq and its patriotic leader, Saddam Hussein, will continue the struggle against American colonialism and imperialism. We will rise victorious against our aggressors. As our great leadership has said, there are no chemical and biological weapons in our country. The American president is part of a Zionist plot to destroy Iraq." And so on and so forth.

In his school the first-year class — seven-year-olds born in the year of the first Gulf war — scrape back their chairs and rise to their feet with the words they greet all visitors with: "Long live our great leader, Saddam Hussein."

"Saddam will make Iraqi bombs go to America and we will emerge victorious," says Mustapha, who was born a month before the 1991 war began.

"And who won the last Gulf war?"

"We did," he says.

His mother, Montaha Ali, teaches in the school. "We believe in God and what will happen to us has already been written. But we are afraid for our children because maybe they are going to drop a nuclear bomb on us," she says.

Other Iraqis display a combination of defiance, righteousness and indifference.

"We have no chemical weapons. This is a plot run by the Israelis and the Jews in America," says Abdel al-Sumariya, an electrician. "Monica Lewinsky is Jewish and they are blackmailing Clinton with a new scandal to make him hit us.

"It's not only her — defence secretary [William] Cohen is Jewish and [secretary of state] Madeleine Albright has Jewish relatives."

"The Jewish lobby in the United States controls Clinton," adds Faris Hamdoon, a university lecturer.

In the hotel lift, a Syrian businessman now living in Brussels, thumps the breast pocket of his expensive dark blue suit. "This is striking at the honour of all Arabs. They didn't do this in Bosnia and they won't do this against Israel. They are driving us back to fundamentalism. We hate the Americans and we hate Mr Blair."

Out in his suburb Abu Ziad is left with his mandolin, his Complete Guide To Letter Writing and the photographs of his children.

"I kept their schoolbooks — that's all. Sometimes when I'm here on my own, I talk to them still and I add the last seven years since they died and imagine them all grown up. I don't wish I'd done anything different. We were a happy family. Except I have a picture of Zena, just before she died. In it I'm standing beside her and when I look at it, I wish I had hugged her."

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Annan poised for peace bid

ATTEMPTS by the United Nations Security Council to agree terms for a personal mission to Iraq by the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annam, were adjourned on Monday night to give the permanent five members more time.

The ambassadors of Britain, the United States, France, Russia and China, meeting for the third time in a week, could not agree on a formula for Mr Annan to put to Iraqi officials.

Mr Annan said the five needed "a little more time" to arrive at a conclusion. "We are operating on the basis of unanimity and I think that we are getting there."

Mr Annan is coming under enormous international diplomatic pressure to embark on a peace mission to stave off military strikes.

On Monday the US envoy, Bill Richardson, reiterated Washington's insistence that any solution must abide by two core principles: "clear and unfettered access" and "full integrity" for UN weapons inspectors (Unscom).

Diplomats said the US and Britain had put forward "red lines" in the sand which the other three had to study before Mr Annan could make a decision.

Rushdie wins UK pledge to combat fatwa

David Pallister

THE British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, pledged this week to conduct a high-level campaign against the fatwa imposed in 1989 on the author Salman Rushdie by the late Ayatollah Khomeini.

Speaking at the Foreign Office with Mr Rushdie at his side, Mr Cook said the priority would be to get a written assurance from the new Iranian government that it would not further the death threat against the author of The Satanic Verses. Efforts would be made to remove the $2.5 million bounty offered last year by the Khordad religious foundation.

With Britain holding the European Union presidency, the issue is likely to be raised at the next meeting of the Council of Ministers. "I will work hard to do everything we can to lower and remove that threat," Mr Cook said.

Mr Rushdie said he was delighted with the "support and solidarity" shown by the Government. He dismissed as nonsense the suggestion by Ayatollah Hassan Sanei, the head of the Khordad foundation, that the fatwa was irrevocable.

"There is always a crescendo of insults coming up to the anniversary," he said, "and this year the noises seem to be coming from the hardliners who lost the election. I am a political football in the internal politics of Iran."

Mr Rushdie's supporters dismissed an Iranian claim that he is considering moving to the United States, as new threats from Tehran dashed hopes that its line on the author was softening. Ayatollah Sanei said the reward might be raised again, "depending on the date on which the sentence is carried out".

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Austria	AS30	Malta	60c
Belgium	BF80	Netherlands	G 5
Denmark	DK17	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 14	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.60
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 500	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,500	Switzerland	SF 3.80

Saddam's mistake was to grow too big for his boots

ONCE upon a time, President Saddam Hussein was Washington's "man", like Diem from South Vietnam, Marcos from the Philippines and Noriega from Panama before him, all thoroughly discredited — later. Western imperialism not only armed and maintained Saddam, it helped install him as leader in return for "political stability" and for oil.

Why make the comparisons? Because the more imperialism changes, the more it remains the same. But you would think from reading media reports in the "here we go again" stakes — with Australia eagerly clutching White House coat-tails — that the history of the Middle East began with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

The borders of the region were imposed by Britain and the United States when the Ottoman Empire broke up after the first world war to ensure that no single Arab nation would emerge and that the oil would stay in Western control. But this is more than a crisis about oil: it is about who will dominate the region and, in the longer run, the entire world.

The politics are so complicated as to defy the understanding of even informed people, let alone those whose analytical capacity is limited to counting missile strikes and to whom the horrors of war are reduced to the level of a sporting event. Power is the only morality.

In our "Brave New World Order" there is a new vocabulary to match. Genuine peace plans to resolve differences are "unrealistic" and will not be allowed to get off the ground while that other war against the poor will be stepped up by the international banks, the World Trade Organisation and the about-to-be-signed Multilateral Agreement on Investments.

My "New World Order" is dedicated to peace, social justice, human rights and disarmament. It offers a future.
Joan Coxsedge,
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

THE conclusion you draw from the Guardian/ICM poll on support for military action in the Gulf — that young people today are bereft of a peace movement and are more bellicose than their predecessors — is absurd (Most Britons back air raids on Iraq, February 15).

I am among those who favour military action in the Gulf, but am by no means one of Thatcher's "hard-edged" children. I have been vigorously opposed to many of the West's recent military interventions: Grenada, Beirut and Somalia to name but a few paternalistic, meddlesome outings in which the US has recently engaged.

The difference in this instance is clear: Saddam Hussein, while he remains at the helm of Iraq, represents a clear threat to the security of the world. His stores of weapons of mass destruction are not merely tools to preserve the security of his country or administration, but the arsenal of an aggressor.

In light of this, you cannot draw parallels with the peace protesters of the sixties and seventies for, were the US now to plan a foray into a tiny, harmless Southeast Asian state, you would find many of the poll's respondents confounding your conclusions.
Christopher Fryer,
London

I FIND it fascinating that a people which is supposed to have become more in touch with its caring side, as evidenced by the outpouring of emotion after Diana's death, is a people also more inclined to bomb the living daylights out of thousands of Iraqi civilians.
Maurice Hickey,
Plymouth

Germany tarred by neo-Nazism

I AM a 16-year-old girl from Halberstadt (near Magdeburg) in east Germany, and am spending a year at school in England.

I was upset by your article on neo-Nazis (Neo-Nazi tide sweeps east Germany, February 1) because it creates a new (east) German stereotype, which is not accurate.

It is wrong to say that "east Germany is a no-go area for foreign people", and that "foreigners can no longer move freely in eastern Germany". I live there and I can tell you that it is definitely not as bad as you described.

I do not deny that neo-fascism and neo-Nazism are problems in Germany. I have had some experience of them and I know only too well that Nazi violence is the worst thing that could happen to anybody.

But the problem is not the young Nazis, but the old people, who experienced the Hitler time and the second world war. They repeat all the old nonsense about the Jews and foreign people. Even my grandparents do, and I feel ashamed.

My generation is likely to adopt these ideas because there is hardly anybody else to tell them anything different. It is easy to blame the young people and not the people who have the authority and the power to do something about the Nazi problem.

I, for example, live in the state of Saxony-Anhalt. We have an unemployment rate of about 20 per cent. Boredom and hopelessness force us to find somebody to blame for all the trouble. I do not want to justify the Nazis and the right wing. On the contrary, I condemn everything they do. I blame the German government for not caring about us, and not doing anything for us.

The other thing which I do not like is the prejudiced view that skinheads are Nazi. Half of my friends are skinheads and they are not racist or nationalist in any way.
Maria-Annabel Hanke,
Studley, Warwickshire

All war crimes must be tried

PROFESSOR Kettler (December 28) bemoans "the rhetorical state of any question about Jewish claims after the Holocaust", which "unfortunately obliges [him] to show the scars that entitle [him] to speak". His proposal is a noble one; but Victoria Brittain's Comment (February 8) debases this rhetorical state yet further, demonstrating precisely why he is so obliged.

Dismissing the Bronislaw Hajda, Erich Priebke and Maurice Papon trials as examples of putting yet "another old man on trial for war crimes committed 50 years ago", the lattermost "at astronomical cost", and claiming that the accused are men "who can no longer do anyone any harm" betrays just how little understanding Brittain has of the suffering that survivors and victims' relatives continue to feel, as well as — and not coincidentally — just how little justice they received in the decades after the second world war.

The attitude is also symptomatic of the complicity and silence of collaborators and bystanders both during and after these crimes were committed. In the case of the African Great Lakes genocide, better to achieve justice sooner rather than later; in Europe's case, better later than not at all. But these are mutually reinforcing, not competing, claims. I would have thought that the cost of all of these trials was a small price to pay for any slight mitigation of an historical blindness from which even Britain (and Ms Brittain) is not immune.
Andrew Lawrence,
Bochum, Germany

A baby boomer fixated on sex

AH, the agony of baby boomer idealism . . . Barbara Ehrenreich's argument (How Bill screwed his generation, February 1) that President Clinton's alleged infidelities symbolise his ongoing betrayal of his generation is, quite frankly, insulting. I am terribly sorry that Ms Ehrenreich's investments in post-war liberalism have left her, in the Clinton era, somewhat lacking in compounded ideological interest, but I can't help but take umbrage at her professing her generation's ownership of the president.

I may be wrong, but I don't remember our Bill ever saying his goal was to forward the financial, emotional, and cultural agenda of baby boomers. Nor does he claim to be the archetypal child of the sixties. Are we to assume, then, that Ms. Ehrenreich holds the president to her own standards simply because of his age? I voted for Bill Clinton because he was concerned about the country's future, not because he is a fan of Jimi Hendrix.

I could say that I own the president, since I am a member of Generation X, and his stint as boss has offered me a lot of opportunity and growth. But I'm not that self-centred. Nor do I take it as a personal affront to my beliefs that Clinton every now and then doesn't do exactly what I'd like him to do.

I feel no disappointment or rage about the president's supposed sexual misdeeds. I take them in stride, and refrain from using them to serve a narcissistic desire to disown the blandness of my generation. The president's sex life means nothing to me, and as a twentysomething who is genuinely exhausted with her parents' pathetic laments about their fading vivacity, I would advise Ms Ehrenreich to find something else to fixate on.
Leah K Hampton,
Hendersonville, North Carolina, USA

WHAT became of the paper of Peter Jenkins and Alistair Cooke? Now I know what they mean by "London tabloid". Your cartoon on the front page of the February 1 issue, entitled "The Penis mightier than the Sword" is not what I'd expect from your paper. Would you have published a graphic illustration of the infamous telephone conversation between Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles? For shame!
George Tait,
Seal Beach, California, USA

Briefly

THE name Enoch Powell does not normally command much admiration in left-of-centre circles. Yet he was entirely opposed to the wholesale destruction of British manufacturing by successive Tory governments of the 1980s, and never subscribed to their Neanderthal social policies. Also, his opposition to the EEC made him declare that he would rather live in an independent socialist Britain than in a Conservative Europe.
Walter Cairns,
Manchester

AN important reason for the decrease in spelling ability, at least at Canadian universities, may be attributed to an increased reliance on computer spell-checks. While it may be that we should be less pedantic in certain areas, I do not regard laziness as a positive trait in anyone, regardless of intelligence.

Here in Canada we have another issue regarding spelling. We are torn between using British and American spellings, and in many it is a form of national pride to write "colour" instead of "color" and "programme", not "program".
John Warkentin-Scott,
Victoria, Canada

REGARDING "British feminists make their mark" (January 11): *au contraire*. With the world population at 6 billion and growing at the rate of another India every nine years, perhaps it is those of us who have not reproduced who should receive the special consideration being suggested by the British feminists (sic) for career women who have children.
Barbara R. MacRoberts,
Shreveport, Louisiana, USA

WHAT is it about Robert Armstrong (England frailties exposed, February 15) and Ian Malin (Ireland fall to Chalmers offensive, February 15) that both hear strange noises from scrums? Armstrong finds that England's "front row creaked", while Malin writes "the Scottish front row was creaking . . ." Beware of creaks bearing biffs, I suppose.
Kevin Childs,
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

IS THERE any good reason why business matters concerning purely British firms should be reported in American dollars?
R M Garven,
Perth, WA, Australia

We generally convert pounds to dollars on the finance and international news pages because the US dollar is the most widely recognised unit of monetary value. However, we retain sterling on the UK news pages — Editor

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Netanyahu cleared of Mossad mess

David Sharrock in Jerusalem

THE Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, was cleared this week of responsibility for one of his secret service's most disastrous operations when an inquiry concluded that a plan to assassinate an Islamic militant leader in neighbouring Jordan was "seriously flawed".

The government-appointed panel sharply criticised the head of Mossad, Danny Yatom, saying that he did not take into account the possible failure of the mission, undertaken last September. Mr Yatom will not be asked to resign but will quietly leave his post in a few months, thereby avoiding public humiliation, according to Hebrew newspapers.

But relations with Jordan, Israel's friendliest Arab nation, have plunged to a new low, with King Hussein said to be furious that the report failed to castigate Mossad for carrying out the operation in his capital, Amman, and that the report did not rule out future attacks there.

In the assassination attempt, two Mossad agents waited for Khaled Meshal, head of the "diplomatic section" of Hamas, outside his office and injected poison into his ear.

The report said: "It was generally believed that the weapon in question and its mode of use were almost infallible."

Mr Meshal was taken to a hospital with breathing difficulties but recovered. His bodyguards chased and caught the two Israelis.

To defuse the crisis Mr Netanyahu appointed a three-member "clarification committee". Critics noted that two members of the panel, Rafi Peled and Joseph Ciechanover, are senior civil servants.

Their report stated: "We reached the conclusion that the prime minister had dealt with the case in a responsible manner, having considered and examined the plans presented to him from every possible aspect . . . We do not therefore find any flaw in the conduct of the prime minister as minister in charge of the Mossad."

Mr Netanyahu approved the Mossad operation in the wake of Hamas suicide bombings last year in Jerusalem which killed 21 Israelis.

"The decision to carry out the attack in Jordan was based on the principle that no place in the world should be allowed to serve as a safe harbour for those who plan to carry out murders and acts of terror in Israel," the report said.

The bungled assassination attempt forced Mr Netanyahu to free Hamas's founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and up to 70 other prisoners to secure the release of the two Mossad agents from Jordan.

It is believed that Jordan told senior Israeli officials that it wanted the report to make a public commitment to refrain from such operations in Jordan. In Amman, angry officials said: "This is a committee appointed by Netanyahu to extricate Netanyahu and handle the 'technical' details."

Opposition leaders were no happier. "I find it hard to believe this committee investigated the affair at all," said Yossi Sarid.

Hollywood helps to stifle paparazzi

Christopher Reed in Los Angeles

AS TWO British photographers face a possible two-year jail sentence next week for ambushing the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger and his wife, a powerful anti-paparazzi bill is being introduced in Washington.

Giles Harrison, aged 29, and Andy O'Brien, aged 31, were found guilty of "false imprisonment".

They used their vehicles to hem in the Austrian-born actor, who was recuperating from heart surgery, and his wife, the television correspondent Maria Shriver, who was pregnant, as they drove their son to school in Santa Monica last year.

Clearly angry, the judge said the photographers had behaved "outrageously".

The senior Democrat senator for California, Dianne Feinstein, has prepared the Personal Privacy Protection Bill with the help of three law professors, said to be the country's best constitutional legal minds, and the enthusiastic support of Hollywood stars.

It has also been endorsed by the Utah Republican Orrin Hatch, head of the Senate judiciary committee.

The generous donations many stars give to political campaigns ensure that Hollywood has substantial influence, but the bill is also backed by the force of sentiment.

Congressman Sonny Bono, formerly of the Sonny and Cher singing duet, was to have introduced it in the House. His death in a skiing accident last month makes the legislation his memorial.

Hollywood is also keen to point out that such legal protection would not be confined to the rich and famous. Richard Masur, president of the Screen Actors Guild, which helped to draft the bill, said: "It is for anyone whose privacy might be invaded . . . this is more and more possible all the time. We think this legislation will deal with 85 to 90 per cent of the most egregious behaviour."

Legal experts say the bill has been cunningly drafted to get round objections — which are expected to come, particularly from civil liberties groups — on the grounds that it infringes such constitutional rights as freedom of speech, enshrined in the first amendment.

A rescue worker searches through the wreckage of China Airlines Flight C1676, while colleagues sift through the debris of homes near Taipei airport hit by the blazing Airbus. At least 205 people are thought to have been killed as the plane crashed while landing in fog on Monday PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON KWONG

Congress get Sonia fillip

Suzanne Goldenberg

INDIA'S mightiest political force, the rightwing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party, is facing panic in its ranks as opinion polls show that power is slipping from its grasp as voting started in the general election this week.

Until a few weeks ago the BJP appeared to be steamrolling towards victory in the elections, which span four days. But the might of the party has been dissolved by the appeal of the latest claimant to the family dynasty that has ruled India through 50 years of independence: Sonia Gandhi.

An opinion poll published in India Today magazine last weekend gives the BJP and its allies their lowest tally yet: 214 seats in the 543-seat parliament. Mrs Gandhi's Congress party and its allies are given 164 seats, and the United Front coalition of the fallen prime minister, I K Gujral, 127 seats — enough for a coalition government should the quarrelling forces unite.

The poll is a dramatic assessment of the BJP's fortunes since Mrs Gandhi entered active politics. Two other surveys also show that Mrs Gandhi, though elusive and a poor public speaker, is winning back support for her divided and demoralised party.

The BJP was also stung last week by calls for its president, Lal Kishan Advani, to withdraw from the electoral fray after a watchdog panel included his name among 72 criminals contesting these elections. Mr Advani faces charges of incitment in connection with the destruction of the Babari Masjid mosque in Adyodhya five years ago.

The BJP has responded to the findings by stepping up its plea for a majority verdict, claiming it is the only party capable of providing stable government in a country undergoing its second election in less than two years. Privately, however, party leaders were huddled in crisis meetings last week at the Delhi home of its prime ministerial candidate, Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Mr Vajpayee, an urbane poet who has cultivated a statesmanlike image, is the most popular candidate for prime minister, dwarfing the ratings for Sonia Gandhi and Mr Gujral. But his party has been unable to shake off its association with upper-caste and puritanical Hindu hardliners who are seen as foes of the Muslims, the Dalits (formerly the untouchables), and women.

Anti-slavery activists jailed

FOUR human rights activists have been jailed in Mauritania after one of them told French television of the continuing widespread use of slaves in the West African country, *writes Alex Duval Smith.*

The four, who include the chairman of Mauritania's main anti-slavery pressure group, SOS Esclavage, were sentenced last week to 13 months in jail.

The source said the arrests, after a France 3 documentary was broadcast in France on January 15, effectively silenced all human rights opposition to the country's leader, Colonel Maaouya Sid' Ahmed Ould Taya.

Mauritania, a former French colony with a population of 2.2 million, announced in 1983 that it would abolish slavery. But the practice, which Col Ould Taya's Moorish supporters claim is justified in the Koran, continued after the government said it could not afford to compensate masters who freed their slaves.

Mauritania, a country of nomads, has seen decades of racial tension as the black-African population has increased in size. Moors and at least three black-African "noble" castes maintain thousands of black slaves.

The Week

THE GEORGIAN president, Eduard Shevardnadze, who escaped an assassination attempt when his motorcade was blitzed by machine-gun fire, grenades and anti-tank weapons in Tbilisi, blamed outside forces for the attack.
Washington Post, page 17

AN ITALIAN court has freed Youssef el-Hallah, the 37-year-old Lebanese captain of the "Ship of Death", the migrant-trafficking tramp steamer involved in a collision on Christmas Day 1996, killing nearly 300 people.

GLAFCOS CLERIDES was re-elected president of Cyprus with 50.8 per cent of the vote, narrowly beating his independent challenger, George Iakovou. Thousands of students had been specially flown in from Britain and Greece to vote.

INVESTIGATORS probing the bombing of an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama, which killed one man and seriously injured a woman, named a former soldier, Eric Rudolph, as a suspect in connection with the attack.

AMERICAN space-age radar technology and British archaeological expertise have led to the discovery of important ancient temple sites in forests in western Cambodia.

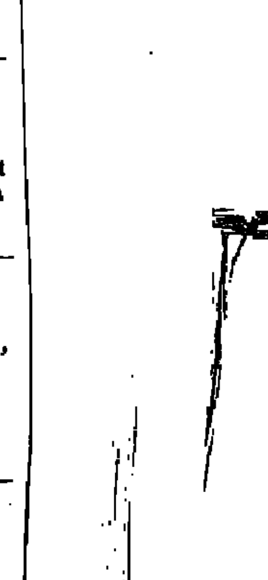
EMERGENCY supplies were at last reaching northern Afghanistan's mountain villages, which had been cut off since an earthquake devastated the area earlier this month, killing more than 4,000 people.

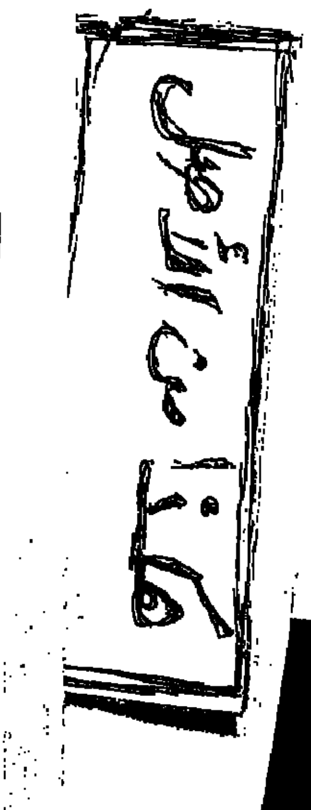
SUDAN'S vice-president, General Al-Zubeir Mohammed Saleh, and several other senior figures died in an air crash while touring the front lines in the war against southern rebels.

TWO tanker trains exploded in Yaoundé, Cameroon, killing 120 people and critically injuring more than 150. The injured were scooping up petrol spilling from the trains which had collided hours earlier. Witnesses said the explosion was caused by a cigarette dropped by someone in the crowd.

MAURICE SCHUMANN, soldier, patriot, religious leader, writer and a founder member of France's Christian Democratic party in 1945, has died, aged 86.

MARTHA GELLHORN, one of the century's greatest war correspondents, has died, aged 89. American-born Gellhorn's coverage of conflicts in Haiti, Vietnam, Cuba and elsewhere won her a reputation for fearless and outspoken reporting.
Obituary next week





Indonesian turmoil as rioting spreads

John Aglionby in Cirebon, West Java

FIVE people were killed, dozens injured and hundreds arrested last weekend as Indonesian unrest at soaring prices exploded in violence.

Two rioters were shot dead by security forces in the central Java town of Brebes for allegedly threatening troops with metal bars and axes; two more people died in rioting on the quiet tourist island of Lombok on Saturday last week; and the fifth victim was trampled to death by a rampaging mob in the west Java town of Losari on the previous night.

The unrest, which began four weeks ago, has rapidly developed into widespread rioting, looting and violence. In recent days rioting has broken out in more than 20 towns. Much of the violence is aimed at shopkeepers of Chinese descent.

In Kadipaten, near Cirebon, hundreds of people burned, ransacked and looted more than a dozen shops at the weekend.

Churches and temples used by Chinese in west and central Java were attacked for the first time last weekend. Many people painted "Muslim family" on the façades of their properties in an attempt to save them from being damaged. "My family and I escaped death by a whisker," said a grocer in Losari, too scared to give his name. "We fled from the back of the shop as we heard the mob ripping down the grilles on the front windows. I am sure we would have lost our lives had we not made a run for it.

"It is an ethnic thing. The current crisis is the worst since President Suharto came to power [32 years ago] but he cannot be blamed so we, the traditional enemy, are made the scapegoat."

The Chinese make up about 5 per cent of the population but control 70 per cent of the nation's wealth. Many indigenous Indonesians believe the Chinese have exploited the masses and grown rich on presidential patronage.

Indonesia's economy began to collapse last July but most people only began to feel the effects when prices shot up last month in the wake of the meltdown of the currency and rising unemployment. Unrest has since been reported in almost half of the 27 provinces.

International bankers in Jakarta said last Sunday that the crisis was likely to continue for months, after Suharto confirmed his decision to ignore international opinion and peg the rupiah to the dollar to try to end the economic turmoil. The International Monetary Fund was reported to have threatened to suspend its $43 billion bail-out package. President Clinton also spoke to Suharto by telephone last week.



Looters fight over a crate of stolen tea in the town of Ciasem, West Java PHOTOGRAPH: YEMI WAH

Suharto has ordered the Indonesian armed forces to act ruthlessly and decisively against unrest in the run-up to the indirect presidential election on March 10.

He also ordered the reactivation of military alert posts created before last year's general election.

According to the sociologist Loekman Sutrisno, Suharto's problem is that he cannot admit his own inadequacies. "Statements blaming subversives sound great but only expose the reality of the regime. He cannot accept that he has failed and is blaming anyone and everyone for his mistakes."

There is little hope of change. Amien Rais, a Muslim scholar, and Megawati Sukarnoputri, former leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party, have offered to stand for the presidency but are outside Indonesia's claustrophobic and tightly controlled political system and so stand no chance of success.

The only option for many is to rely on the younger officers who took over senior military positions last week. They include General Wiranto, aged 50, the commander-in-chief, and Suharto's son-in-law Major-General Prabowo Subianto.

● Bush fires are spreading on the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo, with at least 895 "hot spots" reported as of last Sunday. The outbreaks threaten the return of smog which blanketed a large swathe of Southeast Asia last year, causing widespread health and environmental problems.

Comment, page 12, Washington Post, page 19

Mauritius tries to dodge the tiger trap

Andrew Meldrum in Port Louis reports on a booming island economy

THE collapse of Southeast Asian economies has sent tremors around the world but in few places has the warning jolt been felt more than Mauritius, across the Indian Ocean.

The island feels particularly vulnerable because it has modelled its development on those wounded Asian tigers. The tropical island, covering 1,865 square kilometres, is densely populated by 1.3 million people of a diverse Asian/European/African ethnic mix.

An abrupt halt to Mauritius's economic boom could threaten the relatively low unemployment rate of 5 per cent and, therefore, political stability.

"Many people are anxious, even nervous, that Mauritius will be infected by Asia's economic contagion," said Gilbert Gnany, chief economist for the Mauritius Commercial Bank. "But I don't think we will have anything similar to an Asian meltdown. We don't have the same level of short-term debt as Southeast Asia.

"The fact of the Asian crisis will not directly depress our growth, but indirectly it may slow down growth a bit," said Mr Gnany as he rattled off impressive growth figures of more than 5 per cent of gross domestic product for the past four years.

Mauritius is a puzzling success story. Its three main political parties — the ruling Labour Party, the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) and the Mouvement Socialist Militant (MSM) — are ostensibly socialist parties. But since the 1970s successive governments of all three parties have determinedly pursued free-market economics, bringing rapid growth, high employment rates and rising incomes.

Even opposition politicians concede that the island's economy is healthy. "The economy is doing well, but one is tempted to say it is doing well in spite of the government," said the opposition leader Paul Berenger, founder of the MMM.

"The export processing zones and tourism are faring especially well. However, there are dark clouds on the horizon. Unemployment is already on the increase . . . If a certain number of reforms are not carried out — especially reforms in our education system and orientation of our vocational and training systems — we are definitely heading for trouble in the years ahead."

Since he burst on to the political scene in the early 1970s, Mr Berenger has come tantalisingly close to becoming the island's first non-Hindu prime minister. His MMM formed a now-defunct coalition government in 1995 with the Labour party of the prime minister, Navin Ramgoolam.

Many Mauritian political observers say that politics will remain dominated by Hindus, who make up about 50 per cent of the population. Christians of French, English and Asian backgrounds make up about 30 per cent, Muslims 17 per cent and Chinese 3 per cent.

Divisions could have appeared in this polyglot mix but, aided by prosperity, Mauritius enjoys a relatively friendly multi-party scene.

All three parties are feverishly campaigning in the central, rural constituency of Flac-Bon Accueil ahead of a byelection on April 9. Both Labour and the MMM are vying for the seat, and the former prime minister Sir Anerood Jugnauth, leader of the MSM, has raised the stakes considerably by standing himself. Smaller parties are also fielding candidates.

Sir Anerood has said the byelection race will decide whether he or Mr Ramgoolam leads the Hindu population and is therefore likely to be the next prime minister.

But Mr Berenger, while fielding a Hindu candidate, maintains optimistically that Mauritius is ready for non-Hindu leadership.

"While the issues have changed, our ideals have remained the same," he said. "We stand for unity in diversity, for making Mauritius a real democratic model."

Gabriel Is.
Indian Ocean
MAURITIUS
Port Louis
Rose Hill
Curepipe
Mahébourg
Mauritius

Saving Italy from itself

PRIVATE VIEW
John Hooper

LAST WEEK 150 German economics professors signed an appeal for European monetary union to be postponed or restricted. The same day, in Italy, there was another dramatic episode in the Euro-saga, but of a different kind.

To understand it fully you need to know about Domenica In, a popular television show. It begins as Italians are finishing their Sunday lunches and continues through an afternoon which traditionally brings together the family in homage to *la mamma*. Domenica In offers comedy, music, dance, quizzes and hordes of scantily-clad, well-endowed females.

Last week it also offered the incongruous figure of Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, Italy's treasury minister. He agreed to use the show to give ordinary Italians a say in the images to be put on the euro coins they will be using after January 1, 2002 — provided Italy's partners overlook the little matter of a government debt: 125 per cent of its gross domestic product.

The result astonished everyone: 1.5 million people phoned in. As doubts about the wisdom of having a single currency, mounts everywhere else in Europe, Italians cannot wait to get it into their pockets. Why?

European monetary union, it is true, offers them the prospect of significant economic benefit. If — and it is quite a big if — the new currency is strong, it will mean low interest rates. And that will mean the Italian state can pay off its vast debt on the cheap.

Yet the potential drawbacks are considerable. By sacrificing their currency the Italians are sacrificing the right to devalue it or to allow it to depreciate against the currencies of the other states in the union. Yet devaluation and depreciation have been a useful way of occasionally enhancing the competitiveness of Italian business.

Though it may take an effort, the enterprising, export-oriented industrialists of northern Italy will find ways to compete on grounds other than price, as indeed many have already done. But what of the south, Sicily and Sardinia, with their dependence on government incentives and protection? Might not open competition with the rest of Europe split Italy even more decisively than at present? Might it not be that the north will swim and get still richer, and the south will sink and get still poorer?

How much of this Domenica In's audience grasps is doubtful, especially since Italy's entry into Emu is scarcely a matter for debate. The lira is being carried at breakneck pace towards the euro on a swell of largely unquestioning popular enthusiasm. Why?

A history of conquest and occupation by other Europeans has perhaps made Italians more relaxed about rule from outside. But the key motive is their dissatisfaction with rule by other Italians.

"Inside the Europeanism of the Italians there is a great need to be governed," Federico Rampini wrote in La Repubblica last week. "And if it is not only Rome that is to govern but also the European Commission the whole thing seems more serious . . . The British, French and Germans resist every cession of sovereignty to Brussels. We bless it as a way of protecting ourselves from ourselves."

That is a remarkable indictment of Italian politicians in the 128 years since unification. It is also a testament to Italy's immaturity and lack of self-confidence.

Australians to vote on republic plan

REPUBLICANS and monarchists were both claiming victory last week after the constitutional convention finally endorsed a proposal to replace the Queen as head of state by the year 2001, *writes Christopher Zinn in Sydney*.

After two weeks of talking, the proposal put forward by the Australian Republican Movement (ARM) — that the head of state should be a president chosen by parliament — was passed by 73 votes to 57, with 22 abstentions.

The result was four votes short of the absolute majority which the prime minister, John Howard, had said was required before the plan could be tested by a binding referendum next year.

But Mr Howard said he favoured a referendum none the less. The majority of delegates had, he said, voted "generically" for a republic, even if they were divided on whether the people or parliament should elect the president.

"It would be a travesty, in common sense terms, of Australian democracy for that proposition not to be put to the Australian people," he said.

In an emotional summing up Mr Howard, a committed constitutional monarchist, said he had emerged from the $24 million exercise more idealistic, because of the integrity of the "Australianism" expressed in the debate.

The ARM proposal — a compromise cobbled together by various factions — was nicknamed the "camel". It provides for the public to nominate a presidential candidate who must then win the support of two-thirds of federal MPs.

The ARM chairman and architect of the deal, Malcolm Turnbull, said he was sure Australians wanted a head of state chosen with the bipartisan support of parliament.

"I think this is a very important day . . . We're one step closer to a republic, but I think on this occasion we've taken a couple of steps with one leap," he said.

All sides realise that the referendum campaign will be tough. The proposal must be supported by a majority of Australians in a majority of the six states.

The Tasmanian monarchist David Mitchell said: "We may well say, 'God save the Queen', for nothing will save the republic."

The proposal got a smaller majority than expected at the convention because some republicans who want a president elected by direct popular vote sided with the monarchists.

"We're very pleased with today's result," said Kerry Jones, of Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy.

"We're delighted we're going to stop wasting taxpayers' time and money, and move through to a real referendum . . . to fight against this Turnbull model which doesn't measure up to the safeguards of our current constitutional arrangements."

S African criminals have last laugh

David Beresford

SOUTH AFRICAN criminologists scoffed at a recent report by the World Economic Forum which placed the country third in a list of states worst affected by organised crime, after Russia and Colombia. But the escapades of Colin Chauke have put an end to their derision.

The comparison to Colombia, with its drug cartels, and Russia, with its mafia, was discounted on the grounds that there was no evidence that organised crime in South Africa had infiltrated the state and corrupted high officials. That complacency was shaken last week when Mr Chauke was interviewed by the media outside a police station near Pretoria.

Mr Chauke, a former ANC guerrilla, has been identified as the suspected mastermind of military-style attacks on armoured trucks carrying cash for local banks. He denied the allegation and named the "real" mastermind. He alleged it was the detective leading the hunt for him: "Bushy" Engelbrecht.

Last month a junior minister in Nelson Mandela's administration, Peter Mokaba, confirmed that Mr Chauke had attended a party at his home while on the run. Mr Mokaba said he was unaware of his presence and would have arrested him personally if he had known.

But Mr Chauke's allegations and activities have fuelled fears that the rot may extend further into the justice system and government than acknowledged. Corruption in the police service is already known to be widespread. Figures for 1996 showed that one in four officers in the greater Johannesburg area was under criminal investigation.

There were reports last week that former members of the apartheid security forces and ex-guerrillas had formed an alliance. They are said to have armed themselves with weapons from Mozambique and to have carried out a succession of bullion robberies under the command of former military officers, including a Sandhurst-trained captain.

Whether or not the claims are true, police intelligence estimates that South Africa has more than 190 crime syndicates. They include elements of the Russian mafia, involved in diamonds and weapons smuggling; the Chinese Triads, specialising in the trade in endangered species; and Nigerian drugs rings.

Drug trafficking is rife, thanks to South Africa's location, growing air links, long borders and sophisticated communications and banking infrastructure. Car theft is also popular.

Mark Shaw, from the Institute for Security Studies, says: "Crime grows most rapidly in periods of political transition and violence, when state resources are concentrated in certain areas only."

The ground was prepared for the mushrooming of organised crime during the apartheid era, when the security services set up state-sanctioned alliances with the criminal underworld.

Allegations against Wouther Basson, former head of the apartheid chemical and biological weapons programme, who is facing charges of mass-producing Mandrax and Ecstasy, raise the possibility that the Nationalist government, intentionally or otherwise, created an army of criminals which is still under arms.

The government has committed a large part of the secret service, military intelligence and the national intelligence agency to the battle. But inter-service rivalries and infighting have undermined their contribution. The government's frustration with the intelligence agencies was reflected in an outburst by President Mandela at the recent opening of parliament, when he denounced "bad apples" in the services.

Despite Mr Mandela's boast that crime statistics were improving — with a reduction in the incidence of some serious offences — figures showing a decline in convictions suggest that the forces of law and order are on the retreat. Convictions for using and dealing in drugs, for example, fell from 46,468 in 1991-92 to 19,895 in 1995-96.

The flight of experienced detectives from the force has also left the police badly weakened.

If Mr Chauke is seen to be laughing at law and order in South Africa it is not without justification.

● The legendary editor of the Windhoek Advertiser, Hannes Smit, was jailed for four months last week when a Namibian judge refused to believe he had lost documents relating to the murder of the Swapo activist Anton Lubowski in 1989. "Just bring my nose-drops and books," Smit, aged 65, told friends after he failed to persuade the inquest judge Nic Hannah that he had lost a piece of paper naming the seven killers.

Red carpet veils refugee misery in Bhutan

Luke Harding

ON THE second day of his visit last week to one of the world's last feudal states, Prince Charles was greeted with a red carpet decorated with lucky symbols in coloured rice before tucking into lunch with King Wangchuck of Bhutan. "I'm so happy to have you here," the king said, as the prince bowed deeply.

Two hundred miles away, across tea gardens and a landscape of paddy fields, Tul Bir Gurung was sitting on a stool wondering when he might be allowed to return home to his farm.

Gurung is one of 94,000 Bhutanese refugees languishing in Beldangi refugee camp, a cleared tract of jungle in the rainy flatlands of eastern Nepal that Prince Charles did not see on his 10-day Asian tour. Gurung's forefathers had migrated from Nepal to Bhutan, encouraged by the British, who wanted labour for tea plantations. But he was forced to leave Bhutan after the king introduced a "one nation, one people" policy in 1989.

King Wangchuck continues to preside over this tiny medieval kingdom between India and China, where democracy, television, blue jeans and other Western influences are banned.

The refugees' plight was not on the agenda as the king entertained the heir to the British throne at the Queen Mother's royal residence, Dechencholing Palace. They had already spent 80 minutes together at the Tashichho Dzong, an 18th century Buddhist fortress monastery, now the seat of government in Thimpu, Bhutan's sleepy capital.

Bhutan's long-serving foreign minister, Dawa Tsering, dismissed as "exaggerated" claims made by the refugees. But back at the camp Chandra Khainda, another refugee, invited Prince Charles to come and see for himself. "He should come here and see how we are living," she said. Chandra, aged 27, was sacked from her government job and driven out because she was not a member of Bhutan's ruling ethnic élite, the Drukpas.

At least she was not tortured. Bhanu Adhuikara, a civil servant, was hung upside down, beaten and had pins inserted under his fingernails. He was suspected — wrongly — of taking part in a pro-democracy demonstration. "Prince Charles should pressurise the Government of Bhutan to repatriate his subjects and restore fundamental human rights," he said.

Bhutan has one of the highest per capita number of refugees in the world: a sixth of the population has been driven out by King Wangchuck. Seven years after their expulsion, they are still in exile. The prince returned home last week, but the refugees must continue to wait.

Continental drift may undermine EU vision

THE WEEK IN EUROPE
Martin Walker

THE European Union likes to pride itself on being a bigger and richer economic block than the United States, with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) about 10 per cent larger than that of the US. Certainly Europe accounts for a greater share of world trade, and equally certainly the new single currency will become a serious rival to the dollar once it is launched.

But this superficially comforting state of affairs for Europe's economic patriots is unlikely to last for very long. The EU employers' confederation, UNICE, has published a detailed and sobering report, Benchmarking Europe's Competitiveness, which portrays a continental economy in relative decline. Introducing the report in Brussels last week, UNICE's president François Perigot said that unless matters changed fast, "we shall be bankrupt". His generation had failed its trust, went on this courtly representative of what France calls the "patronat", to safeguard a distinctive European model that combined economic vigour with social justice.

Much of UNICE's diagnosis will be familiar to any student of seventies' Britain, when the country was called the sick man of Europe. Now the ailments of mass unemployment, feeble growth and stagnating living standards have spread to the continent as a whole. Over the past 20 years, the US has on average grown each year by 0.4 per cent more than the EU. Had Europe matched the American performance, it would be much richer, and its unemployment level would be a modest 6 million instead of the current, appalling 18 million. Europe's share of world manufacturing exports has shrunk by 7 per cent over the same period.

In one general conclusion, the employers claim that Europeans literally are not working, and that the real victims of relative decline are therefore Europe's working classes. Europeans are far less likely to be in work, and work fewer hours when they are. And they suffer from the double blow of higher taxes to support swollen governments of a competence so dubious that they deliver a worse environment for job creation than the US or Japan.

Europe spends an average 50 per cent of GDP on the public sector, compared with 34 per cent in the US and 36 per cent in Japan. Public employment, which until 1980 was higher in the US than in Europe, now accounts for 18 per cent of European jobs, compared with 15 per cent in the US and 8 per cent in Japan.

Non-wage labour costs in Europe's manufacturing industry are on average 75 per cent of the wage costs, rising to a peak of 102 per cent in Italy. By contrast, they are only 40 per cent of the wage in Britain, and 38 per cent in the US. The average European has to work until the end of July to pay that year's total taxes on labour. Belgians, with the highest labour taxes, work until almost the end of August, while Japanese workers have paid off their labour taxes by the end of April. British workers pay them by mid-June.

Business costs are sharply higher in Europe. The UNICE report notes that long-distance phone calls and Internet connections are usually double and up to five times higher than those in the US. Europe's costs of transport, solid fuels and all forms of energy are sharply higher.

But beyond the now-routine calls for deregulation, flexible labour markets and slashed public spending, UNICE confesses that it can find no European state on which the rest should model themselves. Despite fashionable claims of Britain's success, the mixed record of the Thatcherite revolution is plain in new figures published by the European Commission on the same day. Eurostat, the EU's statistical arm, forecast that Britain's GDP per head of population will continue to drop, and that the UK in 1999 is likely to be fourth from bottom in the EU league table, ahead of only Greece, Portugal and Spain.

UNICE does point to the imminent launch of the single currency as a panacea. Once European companies are all pricing their goods in euros, it forecasts that competition will intensify, forcing dramatic structural reforms at the company level. Even if true, this seems to imply more unemployment and social pain ahead, at a time when the European project itself seems to have less public support than ever before.

And the report contains one deeply sobering statistic about pensions which may cast some doubts on the euro's prospects. In Britain, where the shift from public to private pensions is well advanced, the total liability of future pension payments is about 5 per cent of GDP. In Germany and France, the liabilities are over 110 per cent of GDP, which will impose a savage tax burden on future generations. And yet the monetary union that goes hand in hand with the single currency will require ever more fiscal harmonisation. A tax regime to fund French and German pension liabilities will not comfortably fit a Britain free of such debts.

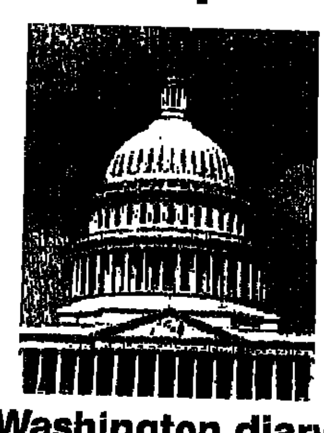
In any report of this kind, one must consider the political motives that lie behind it. Europe's employers clearly want to claw back some of the rights to job protection, shorter working hours and high welfare provision that the trade unions have secured within the framework of the European social model. The US and to a lesser extent Britain, which exemplify the rival Anglo-Saxon model of robust capitalism with greater management rights of hire and fire, represent markedly less equal societies.

But mass unemployment in Germany and France, where the responsible unemployed are occupying government buildings and the less responsible are rioting in the streets, is changing that. The European model is visibly failing, and its victims are primarily the working classes and the semi-skilled.



'I kept my promises. I break all records. 4,820,000 jobless': a protester wearing a Kohl mask expresses frustration at Germany's mass unemployment during a rally in Cologne PHOTOGRAPH PHILIPPE...

Public puts its faith in common sense



Washington diary

Martin Kettle

AMERICA'S moralists are unhappy about the Monica Lewinsky affair, and it isn't hard to see why. Faced with opinion polls which show that their fellow citizens don't believe Bill Clinton's version of events yet also think that he is doing the best job of his career, it is not surprising that the Clinton-Lewinsky question has got some people's moral compass in a spin.

One of the most articulate of the American moralists, Gertrude Himmelfarb, wrote despairingly the other day that it was not just Clinton who is on trial (though, actually, he's not — yet). The American public is also in the dock, says Himmelfarb, because its endemic moral relativism is being tested by the crisis. In her opinion, the public's apparent instinct for saying that sexual behaviour is just a personal matter is part of the vulgarisation and "demoralisation" of modern life.

Well, it is certainly true that in the past few weeks American opinion seems to have been rewriting some of the rules of public conduct. However, rather than put this down to a mass moral failing, as Himmelfarb and the communitarian moralists tend to do, it may be better to look at these same facts in a rather less censorious light.

For instance, a useful way of understanding the Clinton-Lewinsky crisis may be that it is an important episode in the changing face of American legalism, and that this change, which involves a growing reluctance to accept law as the final arbiter of what is good for society, is on the whole no bad thing, even though it may have some undesirable consequences.

To the Himmelfarbs of the world, this is unacceptable. They do not want irresponsible private behaviour to be publicly condoned, and therefore they favour a legal approach. They say that if the charges are false, then Clinton can stay, but if they are true, he must be censured and, if necessary, punished.

America's collective reluctance to bring the full weight of the rules to bear upon a leader who is presiding over a buoyant economy in a world which is largely at peace is more than understandable. Contrary to what Himmelfarb fears, it does not reveal a society without values. It simply shows a society with a sense of proportion. It does not mean that Americans think Clinton is a good man or a bad one, merely that his importance outweighs his failings. It is also, however, part of a more general loss of confidence in American legalism. The law, as always, remains central to American ideas of private and public virtue, and its role as the arbiter of the nation's life is institutionalised to an unusual degree compared with many other countries. But the United States is also a notoriously legalistic country, in ways too obvious and numerous to illustrate here. Those ways have long been something of an international joke, and they may be beginning to embarrass Americans themselves.

Quite when the tide began to turn against American legalism is difficult to say, but there can be little doubt that the O J Simpson case was a milestone in the process. The O J case was important because it showed that a man who was widely believed to be guilty of the most serious crime of all could evade justice by playing the system. O J wasn't just an injustice, though it was that too. His case humiliated the system.

Clinton's case, though quite different in every way, also humiliates the American legal system. Rightwingers will no doubt claim that this is because he too is seeking to evade justice, but that is where the Simpson comparison ends. The public wanted Simpson to be convicted, but they don't want that to happen to Clinton.

All this is part of a wider American retreat from the belief that the law can fashion a good society. If it had not been for Lewinsky and independent counsel Kenneth Starr, you would have been reading a lot this winter about the continuing challenge to affirmative action, a movement which began in California two summers ago and which is likely to be a major theme of this election year. You would be hearing about the states such as Michigan where preferential — as opposed to equal — treatment for black university applicants is under challenge, possibly with national consequences. Or about last week's revolt by voters in Maine against a gay affirmative law.

Only a person who did not know their American history or their US constitutional law would claim that Americans are abandoning this central and abiding pillar of their way of life. But the era — broadly the 1960s — in which the law was used to end many of the problems of a bad society was superseded by an era — the 1970s — in which optimists thought that the law could also create a good society in its place. That era, it seems, is now coming to an end not in the orgy of laissez-faire destruction that the right sought in the 1980s but in a new equilibrium between the law and experience.

The belief that good societies, good people and good behaviour can be created by good laws and by lots of lawyers to enforce them is an illusion whose time has now gone. As that long tide of legalism goes out, albeit slowly and unevenly, it will doubtless create many new injustices and re-expose some old ones. But go out it will and, with luck, one of the consequences could be the rediscovery of what one of America's founding fathers, Thomas Paine, used to call common sense. Indeed, to judge by the popular response to the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, something like that could even be happening already.

A long, cold winter has left the nomads of Northern Tibet stranded and starving, writes **Maggie O'Kane**

The freezing hell that is Shangri-La

THE black carcasses cover the snow for miles, while, above, giant crows float, waiting their turn. Dead buffaloes everywhere: on the main road; outside the nomad's tents. The cruellest winter in Tibetan memory is twisting nature, covering the grass with snow and forcing fields of buffalo to forage in the stomachs of their dead to stay alive.

Northern Tibet is a secret dying zone, spread across an area the length of England. The Tibetan nomads, who along with their Mongolian cousins are the last pure nomads to survive untouched in the world, are finished. Ten million buffalo and sheep are dead or starving, according to official Chinese figures; and almost the entire nomad population is trapped, relying on Chinese army trucks to bring them food, clothes and firewood.

"It's a complete disaster and there's still two months of snow to come," says an international aid co-ordinator in New York. "There are no statistics on the dead. Nobody knows. All we know is that there are 300,000 people at least who are stuck in the area, and it hasn't stopped snowing for four months."

"We're managing fine," says the Chinese government, which permits no foreigners in the area and insists there have been no deaths. Along the roadside lie the carcasses of skinned mountain buffalo — yaks — whose leather, at least, can be sold. The weather is so cold that after seconds outside the eyes freeze. By the roads, women with children tied to their back are driving yaks to the lower valleys, desperately looking for grass; the children's crusted noses have iced over. Solemn faces of babies peer out from their backs, perished and bewildered. Already the babies' cheeks have the texture of rough farm workers. The women are dressed in layers of animal skin, belted with bright yellow and pink scarfs traded for yak butter in the good times. Their hair is the colour of the black yak, and smells of them too; their feet are covered in woollen boots with pointed toes.

In a makeshift hut off the main road to the north, a family of 11 are eating the last of their dead yak. A leg of dried meat is the centrepiece of a room, where the only decoration is an old coffee jar filled with coloured shells.

By the roadside, frozen families wave money at the drivers of the few trucks that pass, begging for a lift; a reprieve from the cold. But on this unforgiving, high-altitude ice rink, surrounded by mountains and death, the people are hard with each other; a driver angry because a frozen, bewildered boy of three has soiled the handmade carpet in the back seat of his car.

Northern Tibet is now a beautiful, scenic abattoir. This, ironically, is the setting of Shangri-La, the land created by James Hilton in his 1933 book, Lost Horizon, the land where the high mountains protect a mythical kingdom from the pain and suffering of the outside, where people live to be 100. But even without the disastrous snows of this winter the life expectancy is 46, and of every five children born one will die before reaching adulthood.

By the time the government and the nomads realised that the snow was not going to stop, millions of animals were dead and the nomad population devastated. The snows, which have fallen non-stop since September, came in 50 snowstorms, each deeper and more deadly than the last. Cut off from the world, the Chinese government has refused to acknowledge the extent of the tragedy or look for outside help.

The north is now the focus of a massive internal and secret relief operation that, despite Chinese efforts, cannot sustain the hundreds of thousands of stranded nomads who need to be fed and warmed in the months to come. In an area north of the mountain town of Amdo, where the Chinese insisted all necessary aid had already arrived, not one of 27 families had enough food or firewood to survive. "It is not going to stop snowing until April and there are still hundreds of villages that can't be reached," said one nomad who had lost half his herd.

But China, irritated and dogged by international protest over its governance of Tibet, fuelled now by two new Hollywood movies, is reluctant to make an international appeal or admit to any deaths among people who have been trapped in temperatures of -35C or lower for four months. The official Chinese news agency, Xinhua, did report that as many as 2,000 people were missing, possibly dead in the snow in the Chinese province of Qinghai and that the government had sent $800,000 in aid. There are no official figures on the Tibetan death toll; no one yet knows how many more of the estimated 200,000-300,000 nomads affected have died in the snow.



Scenic abattoir . . . millions of animals have died and the nomad population devastated by four months of snow PHOTO MAGGIE O'KANE

It seems that gentle, Buddhist Tibet, a sensitive geopolitical gem that straddles India and China, still has a place in Western dreams. Its claims of independence and appeal to Western romantics has saved it from the obscurity China enjoys when dealing with other unruly areas: who has ever heard of Xinjiang, where Chinese Muslims are rioting for independence?

At night in the provinces around the northern Tibetan town of Nagqu, the roads are filled with army trucks moving towards the mountains with relief supplies. The operation involves 500 troops, fleets of trucks, local co-ordinating committees and lorries filled with firewood, maize and coal. "The army of the great Chinese government came in trucks," says Norpo, a 45-year-old nomad who was rescued from the mountains with his five children. "They told us that they had everything under control and that any more snow would be no problem and that we were not to talk about dead yaks or people. I myself don't know anyone who died, except for a boy and his father who they found frozen in a hut, but this snow is not going to stop until April, and even now there are thousands who can't be reached."

IN A ROADSIDE café down in the valley south of Amdo, a drunken nomad who tried to save his herd by driving it downhill, leaving his family behind, is crying and ranting. He sits at a table under a gilt framed poster of a woman wearing a black G-string, stretched along a pink sports car. "I had 57 yaks and I escaped in the snow with 22 of them, but the people who stayed behind have lost everything. The grass is all dead. I move them one place for two or three days and then it begins to snow there and I have to find a new place. I don't know if they can survive. There are still two months of snow to go and now the weaker animals are dead and the strong animals are weak."

A three-roomed hut sits on the side of a mountain, at an altitude of 4,010 metres. The temperature is -39C outside. Inside solemn, weak children breath out with little puffs of steam. Their father, Tashi, wears the skin of a sheep over a second-hand pink polyester track suit and offers a hand, dirty and scaly as an old fish.

Tea is served. It is made from the fat scraped from under the skin of the yak, mixed with water boiled on a fire made from its dung. Tashi says the trouble began in September but nobody knew then what was going to happen.

In Tibet the creature they fear most is the yeti. Tashi has never seen one, but he knows stories of the female yeti who stands up on two feet and pretends in the distance to be a human crying for help. When the shepherd comes close she takes him underground to her cave to be her mate. He knows the story of one yeti who kept her male for 12 years but was gentle with him. The male made his yeti some slippers from her own moulting wool and she was pleased and put them on; the shepherd fled up the side of the cave and she couldn't chase him in her slippers.

In September, when it all began, it was not the yeti they saw but the tremon. The snow bear sleeps under the snow for the winter and comes in the summer to feed on Tashi's buffalo. In the first days of September, when the tremon should have been sleeping, she appeared across the snow in front of Tashi's wife and the two youngest of his 10 children. "As broad as two men in the shoulder. My wife and children ran inside and told me that the tremon had come. I knew it was a very bad omen. Then the snow began to fall."

The snow fell for most of September but nobody paid too much attention. Tibet is snow. But every day the snow got thicker and the long-haired yaks with their soft lips and gums found it hard to nuzzle through it for food. In October the nomads waited for the snow to stop. Tashi had started his herd of 40 yaks in 1963 after he was kicked out of the monastery where he was a monk during the cultural revolution. The yaks he loved best he called Yamora — good milk. By October the snow had reached the knees of his bigger children, but everyone said it would stop soon. The weaker yak began to lose their hoofs to frostbite and their legs became infected. Only the sheep with their sharp teeth could reach the grass.

Tashi and his children drove the stronger yak across the south side of the mountain where the wind is softer, looking for grass. Everything was dead. In November the yak — whose dung they use to build their huts and burn on their fires so they can eat— also began to die.

On Chinese television, controlled groups of journalists report nightly on the Chinese government relief operation: a convoy of Toyota trucks carrying local officials arrives at a settlement where nomads have been trapped for months; they come staggering and blinking from their tents carrying pictures of Chairman Mao. They fall gratefully on the leader of the official delegation, placing the silky white scarfs they use to worship Buddha around his crisp, clean collar.

In the capital, Lhasa, office workers collect waste paper to send to the nomads, so they can burn it and keep warm. There are ceremonial send-offs for the dozens of donation trucks from Lhasa, accompanied by the waving of white flags, army salutes, and 100 or so cheering people, under the TV cameras and gothic town lights that illuminate the central square. The only journalists allowed in the area are Chinese or controlled Tibetans. It is a "family" tragedy where honour dictates that suffering is better than international shame, something that a three-year-old with an iced face whimpering in the cold might not understand.

In the headquarters of the international agencies in New York and Geneva there are fears of a catastrophe that is still in its infancy. "It is just beginning," says one official. "The Chinese are doing what they can, but they simply don't have the logistical skills to run a long-term operation like this. There are thousands of nomads who will need feeding for months. Most of them will end up begging in the cities by spring. We have the experience to do it, but they have to ask."



White-out . . . the snows have covered the grass across an area the size of England PHOTO: MAGGIE O'KANE

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Al Fayed backs claims of conspiracy to kill Diana

SIX MONTHS after her death in a road crash in a Paris underpass, Diana, Princess of Wales, last week seemed to occupy even more newspaper column inches than she did in life, when supposed friends and insiders joined in grotesque speculation as to whether she was pregnant or planned to remarry.

Much of it was provoked by a book by two American journalists, Thomas Santon and Scott McLeod, who explored the possibility that the princess was pregnant when she died, and that she was about to become engaged to Dodi Al Fayed, in whose company she had spent most of the previous six weeks.

The book was approved by Dodi's father, Mohamed Al Fayed, the owner of Harrods, who supported another of the book's suggestions by saying he was "99.9 per cent certain" that the princess and his son were the victims of a conspiracy and were forced off the road by agents of the British establishment.

The disgruntled Mr Al Fayed, who is awaiting a decision on his application for British citizenship, was urged by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, to be more restrained in his statements in deference to the feelings of the princess's two sons. Mr Blair's concerns were thought to reflect those of the Queen, with whom he is said to have forged something of a rapport in the aftermath of the Paris crash.

Mr Blair also condemned the "Diana death industry" and its marketing of tacky memorabilia, the latest example of which is an Internet game that allows players to drive a Mercedes through a tunnel while pursued by paparazzi. Even he, however, is powerless to halt the trade in Dianabilia, though the Diana Memorial Fund is close to completing a copyright agreement which may prevent unapproved traders from using her photograph on ashtrays, T-shirts and mugs.

While all this was going on, police arrested Diane Holliday, a 36-year-old hotel consultant, who claimed that Dodi Al Fayed was the father of her 15-month-old daughter. She said she had become pregnant during an affair which began in 1995, and that the child had been adopted by a family in the United States. Police said Mrs Holliday was being questioned "as part of an investigation into an alleged financial deception".

Mark Lawson, page 12

IN AN attempt to head off a revolt by up to 50 backbench MPs, ministers insisted that the Government had not "gone soft" on the media empire of Rupert Murdoch, which is accused of a predatory newspaper pricing policy designed to drive poorer rivals out of business.

The Government suffered a defeat in the House of Lords when peers, including 23 from the Labour benches, forced through an amendment to the Competition Bill which would outlaw the kind of ruthless price-cutting campaign practised by the Times. Downing Street shrugged off the amendment, saying it would be killed when the bill came to the Commons. This heightened suspicion by Labour leftwingers that Mr Blair is going easy on the Murdoch group out of fear of losing the support of the tabloid Sun newspaper.

Murdoch has escaped two previous referrals to the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) by pleading that, although he commands some 41 per cent of national newspaper readership, his papers are not so "dominant" as to make his cross-subsidised pricing illegal.

The Competition Bill will confer new powers on the OFT director, John Bridgeman, which ministers say will be sufficient to enable him to act against predatory pricing. Sceptics fear they may still not be strong enough.

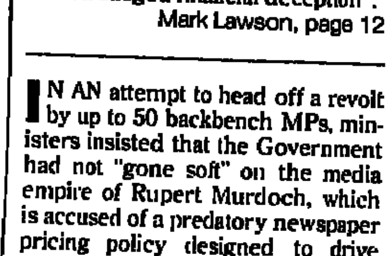
IN ANOTHER move that displayed the capacity of the House of Lords to embarrass the Government, peers decided to launch an inquiry into the case for decriminalising cannabis, so reigniting debate on the issue in the face of pledges by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, to retain the ban on the drug.

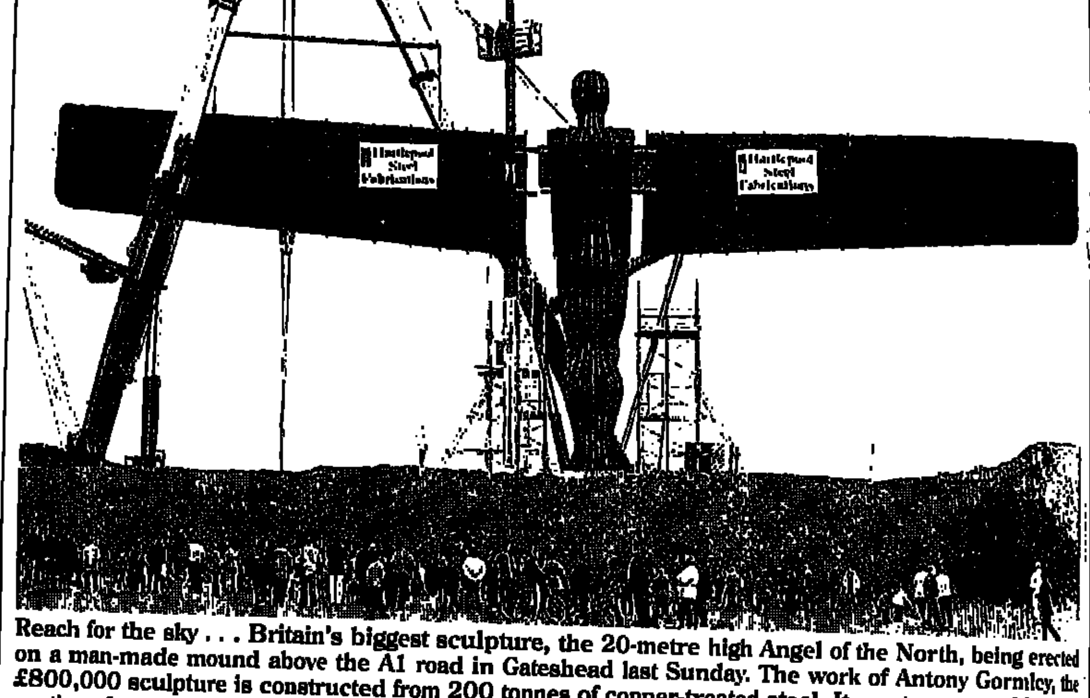
The Lords science and technology select committee was influenced by a combination of increasing public debate and by the findings of a report by the British Medical Association recommending the legalisation of cannabis-based drugs for medicinal use.

A small group of Labour MPs has also called for a royal commission to look into the question, but peers are seen to have greater freedom to confront controversial topics than do their colleagues in the Commons. The Government, however, has no obligation to take note of reports published by select committees of the Lords, though in practice it would have to acknowledge the findings of an independent and respected group of peers.

THE FORMER Liberal leader, Sir David (now Lord) Steel, was ruled by the Commons standards and privileges committee to have broken parliamentary rules by failing to disclose his pay of £93,752 as chairman of the Countryside Movement. He did disclose his appointment in the Register of Members' Interests for 1996 but did not deposit the required employment agreement because, he said, he had no formal contract.

Dale Campbell-Savours, the Labour MP who had complained about the omission, said that if the public had known that a prominent Liberal Democrat was on the payroll of the foxhunting lobby, it would have become an issue in last year's general election.





Reach for the sky . . . Britain's biggest sculpture, the 20-metre high Angel of the North, being erected on a man-made mound above the A1 road in Gateshead last Sunday. The work of Antony Gormley, the £800,000 sculpture is constructed from 200 tonnes of copper-treated steel. It was transported in three sections from a fabrication works 30 miles away in Hartlepool PHOTOGRAPH: OWEN HUMPHREYS

Tobacco firms' secrets revealed

Sarah Boseley

THE tobacco industry was told by scientists working for it nearly 40 years ago that cigarettes could cause cancer, and 20 years ago was considering alternative ways to make money out of people's addiction to nicotine if smoking became socially unacceptable.

These damning revelations are contained in documents produced in court in Minnesota during the current litigation against United States tobacco manufacturers in which healthcare providers are sueing for the costs of treating people whose disease and sometimes death was smoking-related.

In what is thought to be the earliest warning from within the industry, British scientists told manufacturers in 1958 of the link between smoking and lung cancer.

In a document put together after a month-long tour of US medical research establishments, H R Bentley, D G I Felton and W W Reid, who worked for British American Tobacco (BAT) in Britain, stated that almost every scientist they met believed the two were connected.

"With one exception, the individuals whom we met believed that smoking causes lung cancer."

By the end of the 1970s, the tobacco companies had worked out that nicotine was the addictive, but not the most harmful, element in cigarettes. What they needed, said staff at their establishment in Southampton, was a socially acceptable product containing nicotine that would keep customers hooked.

"We have to satisfy the 'individual' who is either about to give up or has done so . . . We are searching explicitly for a socially acceptable addictive product involving:

- ❑ A pattern of repeat consumption;
- ❑ A product which is likely to involve repeated handling;
- ❑ The essential constituent is most likely to be nicotine or a 'direct' substitute for it;
- ❑ The product must be non-ignitable (to eliminate inhalation of combustion products and passive smoking)."

In fact, BAT had in March 1976 produced a paper entitled The Product In The Early 1980s, which said: "In the past 20 years there have been several forecasts of the demise of the cigarette."

It states that there had been suggestions they could be supplanted by nicotine chewing gum or marijuana. But the smoker had been remarkably resistant to such ideas. Chewing tobacco, snuff and nicotine-containing chewing gum were all "potential rivals if cigarette smoking become socially undesirable".

It goes on: "Sweets or confectioneries containing nicotine carry the danger of over-dosage — nicotine is an acute poison." But it reflects that there must be something better than chewing gum as "an oral method of administering a five minute dose of nicotine".

The possible legalisation of cannabis gave the boffins some ideas. The paper goes on: "One avenue for exploitation would be the augmentation of cigarettes with near-subliminal levels of the drug."

It concludes that the greatest threat to cigarettes lay probably "not in further evidence of a direct link between smoking and disease, but the increasing tendency to portray smoking as a socially undesirable habit".

Pressure from governments for low-nicotine cigarettes would end in less "satisfaction" for consumers. "Then surely smokers will question more readily why they are indulging in an expensive habit."

BAT's staff were on the ball. An article in the Journal of the American Medical Association last September observed that the tobacco manufacturers and the drug companies were now pursuing the same customers — nicotine addicts. It was clear, it said, that "current regulatory policy favours the tobacco companies, which encounter little regulation to speak of and can introduce new, nicotine-maintenance products quickly and easily".

Victims win first battle

LUNG cancer victims won their first battle last week in their fight for compensation against tobacco companies, after the Court of Appeal removed an obstacle which threatened to derail them, *writes Clare Dyer*.

The court reassured lawyers they will not be liable for huge legal costs if they lose, confirming that lawyers who lose cases brought under no-win no-fee deals are no more at risk of having to pay their winning opponents' costs from their own pockets than those funded by legal aid or clients paying privately.

Claimants' lawyers feared they would have to pull out after the companies, Imperial Tobacco and Gallaher, indicated they might seek costs against them if they lost, and the High Court refused an order protecting them.

The case is the first on the ramifications of no-win no-fee deals — so-called conditional fee agreements — to reach the courts. Mr Justice Popplewell's refusal in the High Court last October to rule out personal cost orders against law firms and barristers had threatened to throw government plans for a big extension of no-win no-fee litigation into disarray.

Lawyers for the cigarette manufacturers had suggested the ex-smokers' lawyers were the prime movers behind the case and should face costs — which could total £10 million — if they lost.

The appeal court upheld Mr Justice Popplewell's decision to refuse "advance immunity" from cost orders, but reassured the lawyers that this was not necessary. The fact that they were acting under conditional fee agreements — allowing them up to double their usual fees if they won, with a ceiling of 25 per cent of damages but nothing if they lose — put them at no special risk.

Martyn Day, senior partner of Leigh, Day and Co, one of two firms handling the claims, issued writs last week for nine new claimants, bringing the total number to 50. He said: "The cloud the defendants have put over us in this case has been dispelled by this judgment."

Fears for IRA ceasefire as Sinn Fein faces talks ban

John Mullin

GERRY ADAMS voiced his fury on Monday as he saw Sinn Fein's place at the negotiating table on Northern Ireland's future slipping away.

The British government earlier began the process of ejecting the party from the talks after two killings last week in which the IRA was believed to be involved.

Mr Adams, Sinn Fein's president, said: "I am absolutely pissed off. We tried to make this thing work and those who have no interest in making it work seize on two men being killed to exploit it and bring this process down."

The ejection procedure was expected to be completed by Wednesday. Sinn Fein vowed to mount a legal battle to stay in the talks. Senior figures doubt whether they can influence the IRA to keep to its ceasefire if Sinn Fein is suspended, probably for as little as three weeks.

On Monday there were signs of disagreement between the British and Irish governments. The British alone called for Sinn Fein to be excluded, although Dublin is expected to support the move.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, forwarded the indictment after Ronnie Flanagan, the Royal Ulster Constabulary Chief Constable, linked the IRA to the murders in Belfast last week of a Catholic drugs dealer, Brendan Campbell, aged 30, and an Ulster Defence Association member, Bobby Dougan, aged 38.

Mr Adams asked whether Ms Mowlam had demanded an assessment from Mr Flanagan on the murders of two Catholics last month, immediately after the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) restored their ceasefire. No organisation claimed responsibility but the UFF is suspected. Ms Mowlam was forced to admit that she had made no such request. Sinn Fein said that that meant Catholics were being treated as second-class citizens.

Martin McGuinness, Sinn Fein's chief negotiator, said of the indictment: "This is a charade. It amounts to a kangaroo court. We are seeing a lynch mob of Ulster Unionists led by the British government."

He denied that Sinn Fein, which has gained little from negotiations, was interested in an exit strategy. He said he believed the IRA ceasefire was intact, but he emphasised that Sinn Fein spoke only for its voters.

Church offers Lord's Prayer in two forms

Madeleine Bunting

THE General Synod of the Church of England agreed last week to include two versions of the Lord's Prayer in its new liturgy to head off conflict with traditionalists.

The modern language version replaces "trespass" with "sin" and "lead us not into temptation" with "save us from the time of trial".

This version is closer to the Hebrew and brings the Church of England into line with other Christian denominations, said the Rt Rev David Stancliffe, Bishop of Salisbury, and chairman of the Liturgical Commission.

The changes prompted dismay among Synod members. The Rt Rev Peter Nott, Bishop of Norwich, led the protest in support of the traditional version.

He voiced the concern of many Synod members about changing the words of the one prayer still widely known in England.

"Occasional worshippers cannot say by heart the new version of the Lord's Prayer and are automatically made to feel strangers when they encounter the modern version."

The debate is part of the Church of England's process of preparing a replacement for the much-criticised Alternative Service Book, which was licensed in 1980.

Bishop Stancliffe argued that few people now understood what the phrase "lead us not into temptation" really meant.

Anthony Kilmister, chairman of the Prayerbook Society, accused the Church of bowing to political correctness in "mutilating" the nation's liturgical inheritance.

The modern version

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin
against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.



William Hague being offered copies of his party's report, The Fresh Future PHOTO: MARTIN ARGLES

Hague presents fresh start

Michael White

WILLIAM HAGUE this week launched the Conservatives on the long march back to power when he unveiled the most drastic package of internal reforms since the emergence of a semi-democratic electorate in the 1870s prompted Disraeli's creation of a mass party machine.

No section of the party, from the dismissal and election of future leaders to the clean-up of much-criticised foreign fund-raising, has been left untouched by Mr Hague's working party, led by Lord Parkinson, party chairman, since John Major stepped down last July.

MPs have been left with the crucial role of voting out failed leaders and weeding out unsuitable candidates for the vacancy, leaving a one member/one vote (OMOV) ballot of all 300,000 remaining party members to make the final choice.

But last minute haggling has won useful concessions for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who had feared a purge for their pro-European views — much as Labour MEPs are braced for similar culling in a process which gives the last word to the party leadership. Tory MEPs have done better.

Though would-be candidates will be vetted by Tory regional party officials, the final choice of their place on the candidates' list — vital to their chances under the form of proportional representation (PR) now being adopted — will be left to the rank and file. Labour rank and file get their say at the start of the process, not the end.

Entitled The Fresh Future and drawn from democratic party constitutions — left and right — around the Western world, Mr Hague's declared plan to revitalise the mass party mixes Blairite reform rhetoric with Mr Hague's own equally slick world of management consultancy.

It also includes a target of 1 million grassroots members — half of them younger than Mr Hague himself, who, at 36, is barely half the current average age. The traditionally disruptive Young Conservatives and Conservative Students are being folded into a youth body called Conservative Future. Women and ethnic minorities will also be targeted, but not via quotas or all-women shortlists, which Mr Hague denounced as patronising.

Recalling his promise to "change the way we do business" to regain the trust of the British people, Mr Hague declared he had changed "more in eight months than Labour managed in 18 years.

"I said we had to understand why we lost. In everything we have done since [May 1] we have shown that we do understand."

As the climax of an unprecedented exercise in mass participation Conservative party members will be asked to endorse the blueprint in an OMOV ballot. Its results will be announced at the party's spring conference on March 29.

The launch of The Fresh Future was promptly criticised by grassroots Tory critics for concentrating too much power in the leader's hands and mocked by Labour as "rotten to the core" — not least because of reports that the multi-millionaire tax exile, Michael Ashcroft, will enjoy a major fund-raising role.

Mr Hague brushed aside suggestions that Mr Ashcroft will underwrite the targeted £16 million needed to restore depleted Tory funds if no one else does. "Nobody is bankrolling the Conservative party. The Conservative party attracts funds, has attracted funds and continues to attract funds from many different people, from a wide variety of people," he said.

He concentrated on the streamlining of the old "Byzantine" structure to create a single party with a proper constitution. Historically the Tory party had no legal status, being merely the creature of the leader.

But Mr Hague also invoked his "six principles" to stress unity under a powerful governing "board" representing all strands of the party; decentralisation; wider democratic participation in the picking of leaders, MPs and MEPs; involvement in policy making via a Labour-style policy forum; integrity expressed in a high-powered new ethics and integrity committee to be chaired by a QC to investigate alleged impropriety; and greater openness, not least in fund-raising.

In Brief

CANCER is now Britain's biggest killer following successes in combating heart disease, according to the Cancer Research Campaign. Last year 156,890 people died of cancer — nearly 9,000 more deaths than those due to heart disease. Death rates for both types of illness have been falling.

BRITISH car buyers are paying up to 50 per cent more for their cars than other European customers, according to European Union figures. Officials in Brussels accused car manufacturers of making "windfall" profits and warned of legal action.

LABOUR MPs expressed concern that Scotland could be independent within 10 years after opinion polls showed the Scottish National Party on course to take a third of the seats in the Scottish parliament.

PATRICK McKINLEY, one of the men accused of involvement in the IRA Docklands bombing in 1996, was cleared at the Old Bailey after the judge ruled that there was insufficient evidence against him.

HUMAN remains were found buried in the former London home of Benjamin Franklin, founding father of American independence. It is thought the bodies were robbed from graves and used for medical research by a close friend of the statesman.

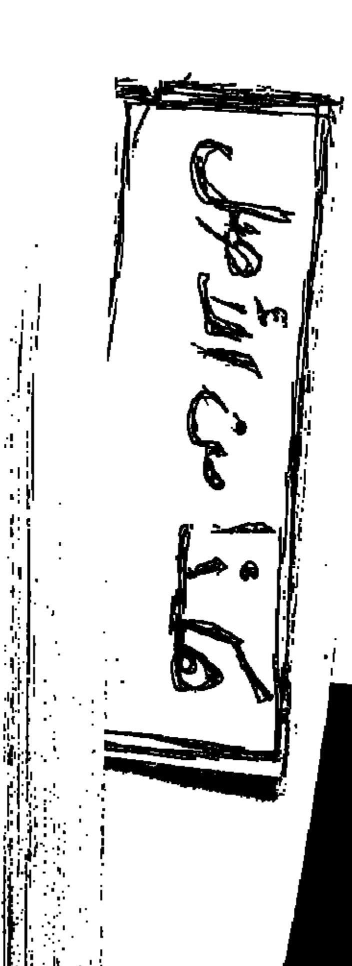
MORE than 5,000 voluntary roadside drugs tests are to be carried out on motorists in March. The trial of testing equipment comes in response to evidence that almost one in five drivers killed in accidents is under the influence of illicit drugs.

GRAMPIAN'S chief constable, Ian Oliver, resigned after he was photographed kissing a 26-year-old woman in a woodland car park while on duty.

JAMES HALL, aged 24, became the first criminal in Britain to be given an automatic life sentence under the "two strikes and you're out" law introduced by the previous Home Secretary, Michael Howard. Hall admitting wounding with intent to cause grevious bodily harm.

A COACH company, Brelaton, formerly the Travellers Coach Company, was fined £10,587 for faulty brakes and a defective speed limiter on a coach that crashed in Kent in 1993, killing nine American tourists and the driver.

THE Royal National Theatre's production of King Lear was the big prizewinner at the Olivier Awards in London. Ian Holm won best actor for his performance as Lear, while Sir Richard Eyre was judged best director. The best actress award was won by Zoe Wanamaker for her Electra.



Short vents fury at 'sad lies'

Lucy Ward and Michael White

IN A passionate denunciation of the "vultures" she claims have tried to smear her reputation, the International Development Secretary, Clare Short, last week accused a fellow cabinet minister of spreading malicious lies about her.

Her remarks, on a BBC television documentary called Clare's New World, provoked further questions over the outspoken minister's judgment, which was called into question late last year after she said that the Montserrat islanders, seeking aid after a volcano eruption, would be "asking for golden elephants next".

The film showed her accusing an unnamed ministerial colleague of telling a journalist that, during a Cabinet meeting, she had likened the Ulster Unionists to the Ku Klux Klan.

She denied making the remarks, but added: "It's just utterly malicious, it's someone from within the Cabinet because it's a lie about a discussion that did take place. It's very sad. It's extraordinary that people on your own side would do such things."

Ms Short admits she was damaged, as well as personally "bruised and battered", by her Montserrat comments, but insisted that others have attempted to use the gaffe against her. She said: "I am amazed by how many vultures there are out there trying to pick my eyes out."

Ms Short has ridden out a series of alleged gaffes, including referring before the election to "dark forces" within Labour.

Tony Blair declared his support for Ms Short — further proof that Downing Street is determined not to let Fleet Street pick off ministers.

"He likes Clare Short, he respects Clare Short and he thinks she's a good cabinet minister," said the Prime Minister's spokesman.

For good measure, the spokesman said that he had attended every Cabinet meeting since May 1 and "never heard" the remarks attributed to Ms Short.

Earlier this month an inter-departmental tussle broke out after the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, revealed plans to take back partial responsibility for Britain's remaining 13 colonies from Ms Short's Department for International Development.

Sources close to her said she did not know which cabinet minister had allegedly briefed against her.

The documentary saw Ms Short adopting a familiar combination of outspokenness, candid acknowledgment of errors and occasionally self-righteous indignation at others' failure to appreciate her intentions.

She said at the start of the programme: "I'm going to try and be good, I always do, but I can't help being me."

● Mr Cook visited Montserrat for six hours last weekend, and flew by helicopter over the island's abandoned capital Plymouth.

Prisons to get cash boost

Alan Travis

AN EMERGENCY cash injection of £70 million for Britain's overcrowded jails — the second such package in six months — was ordered last week by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, to cope with a record prison population that is rising by 1,000 a month.

The money has been found from Treasury reserves despite the Government's decision to keep to Tory spending limits for the first two years in office. It comes on top of a £43 million package announced in July to cope with the shortage of prison accommodation.

The money is to be used as a stop-gap measure while longer-term decisions are made on whether Labour should embark on a programme of private prison building.

Mr Straw said the money would be used to extend the use of the prison ship, HMP Weare, moored in Portland Harbour, Dorset, to build six more houseblocks at existing prisons, to convert office and other rooms into cells, and to hold extra prisoners in newly built jails.

"It provides additional staffing and funding for regime activities to keep prisoners constructively occupied," he said. The package will provide some 3,920 extra places for inmates.

Last week the jail population stood at 64,339. The number has risen by more than 20,000 over the past five years, and thousands of prisoners are doubled up in cells designed for only one.

The prison service director-general, Richard Tilt, earlier this month predicted that a further 24 prisons would have to be built at a cost of more than £2 billion to cope with the forecast growth in prison population.

His warning followed publication of Home Office estimates suggesting that, if trends continue, the numbers in jail will rise to up to 92,600 within seven years, even allowing for early release of 3,000 inmates on an electronic tagging programme.

'Mad hatter' judge quits

Clare Dyer

A JUDGE twice voted the worst on the High Court bench by lawyers has resigned after unprecedented censure from the Court of Appeal, which accused him of weakening "public confidence in the whole judicial process".

Mr Justice Harman resigned last week after learning he was to receive savage criticism by three appeal judges. He is thought to be only the second High Court judge this century to resign over his behaviour on the bench.

Had he not offered to resign, it would have required a resolution of both Houses of Parliament to remove him, a step that has never been taken against an English judge. Unlike circuit judges, High Court judges cannot be sacked for incompetence or misbehaviour.

Described by lawyers in a recent survey as "mad as a hatter" and "very unpredictable and nasty", Mr Justice Harman was a template for the public image of the out-of-touch judge, best known for asking "Who is Gazza?" and "Who is Bruce Springsteen?"

The appeal judges were angered by Mr Justice Harman's treatment of a farmer, Rex Goose, who was bankrupted by a confidence trickster. He was kept waiting for 20 months before judgment was given, which the judges said was "inexcusable".

The judge was found to have forgotten large chunks of the evidence and lost his notes by the time he delivered judgment, wrecking the farmer's chance of winning redress. The Court of Appeal ordered a retrial — a very rare move.

A statement from the Lord Chancellor's Department said Lord Irvine was "extremely concerned" about the lengthy delays in giving judgment and "shares their concerns". The judge will continue to hear cases until he steps down on April 20 on a full judge's pension of £56,000 a year.

Lord Justice Peter Gibson, who heard the appeal with Lords Justice Brooke and Mummery, said in his judgment: "The court is driven to take this exceptional course on the ground that a substantial miscarriage of justice would be occasioned to Mr Goose by allowing the judge's decision to stand.

"Conduct like this weakens public confidence in the whole judicial process. Delays on this scale cannot and will not be tolerated. A situation like this must never occur again."



Guardian photography was recognised at last week's Nikon Press Awards as being of the highest quality. Roger Bamber won the arts and entertainment category. Martin Godwin, who took this photograph of Dorothée Blacher during rehearsals for Swan Lake at London's Royal Albert Hall, was also commended in the same section. John Reardon of the Observer won the features category, and Ian Waldie of Reuters was designated Press Photographer of the Year

First evidence found of repetitive strain injury

Sarah Boseley

A STUDY published last week was hailed as the first medical evidence of the existence of repetitive strain injury (RSI), which has forced thousands of keyboard workers and others, including musicians, to down tools with pains in their limbs, necks and backs.

Physiotherapist Jane Greening and physiologist Bruce Lynn, backed by the charity Action Research, focused not on muscles and joints but on the sensory nerves in the hand. They found reduced sensitivity to vibration not only among RSI sufferers but also among office workers who have not developed the condition.

Using a vibrometer on the hands and arms of a group of RSI patients and "at risk" office workers in their two-year study, they found that those with RSI had lost about half of their sensitivity. When they were tested again after using a keyboard for a few minutes as fast as they could, a further loss of function was found.

The final test involved a strong vibration applied to the arm. In those with RSI it caused unpleasantness and pain.

Among keyboard workers who were not suffering from RSI the researchers found some initial symptoms, including a loss of sensitivity to vibration — which came as a surprise, Mr Lynn said. It meant that the vibrometer could be used to discover which workers were at risk of developing the condition.

Ms Greening said RSI had been "a little mysterious for both the medical and perhaps legal professions". In October 1993 a judge dismissed it as "meaningless" and said it "had no place in the medical dictionary", although there have since been some substantial compensation awards.

The study was welcomed by the RSI Association. "While we have known for years that RSI is a real condition, it has been hard to prove to some people," said the director, Peter Kilbride.

English is the most commonly taught language in Europe

Stephen Bates in Brussels

BRITAIN may still be on the periphery of Europe as far as her European Union partners are concerned, but English is taking over as the Continent's most common language, according to statistics released in Brussels last week.

They show that almost 90 per cent of all youngsters are now being taught English as a second language, much to the chagrin of the French, who have discovered their language has been supplanted everywhere beyond its borders except in the institutions of the European Union.

Less than a third of non-French speaking children are now being taught French as their second language.

German comes a poor third — just 18 per cent learn it as a second language, followed by 8 per cent learning Spanish.

Even in primary schools, a quarter of European youngsters are taught English, with French being taught to just 4 per cent of non-Francophones.

The French government is so concerned that it is making strenuous efforts to sponsor language teaching, both in the EU applicant countries of eastern Europe and in the Far East. A recent gathering of Francophone nations found more than 100 where the language is spoken, but only a handful where it is spoken by more than a tiny minority.

The British are maintaining their reputation for not being able to speak foreign languages — the survey shows that the UK is alone among member states, except for Ireland, in not teaching primary school children a second language.

Even at secondary level it does not compete with the range of languages taught elsewhere, such as Finland, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, where two or three extra languages are the norm.

The educational statistics, drawn up by Eurostat, the EU's statistical unit, indicate accelerating trends for children to start school earlier — most three-year-olds in many countries have already started schooling — and a doubling of the numbers entering higher education over the past two decades.

Blair acts on class sizes pledge

John Carvel

TONY BLAIR last week launched the first stage of the Government's programme to cut class sizes for five to seven-year-olds, by allocating £22 million for the recruitment of extra infant teachers.

The Prime Minister said the money would benefit nearly 125,000 children, who will no longer start the next school year in September in classes of more than 30.

One of the main education pledges in Labour's election manifesto was to set a maximum of 30 for all infant classes by 2001. Ministers estimate there are about 500,000 such children in classes above that limit, and have asked local education authorities to develop plans to reorganise primary schools to eliminate the problem.

The first tranche of the new money will go to 65 of the 130 authorities in England which came forward with the most practical proposals for early action.

But they did not include some of the worst overcrowding blackspots. Officials in the London borough of Kingston — where a record 74 per cent of five to seven-year-olds are in classes over 30 — said they could not solve the problem without a big investment in new classrooms.

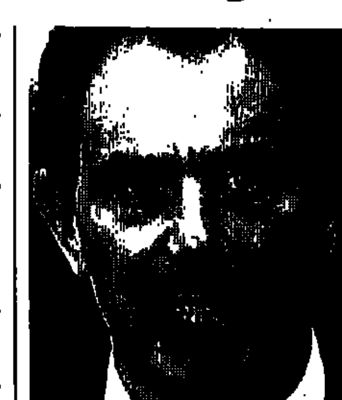
The Education and Employment Secretary, David Blunkett, is expected to offer capital to expand primary school premises as part of a £250 million New Deal fund for schools to be allocated in the spring.

"Reducing class sizes is essential if all children are to have access to the teaching support they need in their crucial early years, when they master the basics of literacy and numeracy," he said.

The class size pledge is being funded from savings on the assisted places scheme, which offered subsidised places for poorer children at independent schools. By phasing the scheme out, the Government expects to generate £100 million for infant classes by 2001.

The announcement was welcomed by teacher unions. David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "The sooner we can reduce the classes for all infant children the better."

But he warned that ministers would find it difficult to deliver their pledge in full. The 65 authorities in the vanguard of the programme were being given 100 per cent funding to recruit extra teachers in schools with room for extra classes. But there would be a "gross waste of resources" if heads were made to split classes of 31 or 32 pupils and build extra classrooms to accommodate them.



Blair: 65 authorities to benefit

The Local Government Association forecast enormous practical problems for overcrowded schools on sites without room for expansion. Areas with clusters of small village primaries which were all slightly overcrowded might not be able to let parents have their first choice of school if they had to keep within a strict ceiling on class numbers.

Fall in mature students blamed on tuition fees

A SHARP drop in numbers of mature students applying for university has raised fears that the Government's plans to encourage lifelong learning were being scuppered by the introduction of tuition fees, *writes John Carvel*.

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service last week reported that applications among students over 24 were 18.3 per cent down on last year. This compared with a drop of 1.9 per cent in applications from under-21s and 13.4 per cent among 21- to 24-year-olds.

Tony Higgins, the service's chief executive, said that school-leavers appeared to be undeterred by the introduction of a £1,000 fee and phasing out of the student maintenance grant.

"They clearly see 40 years of earning power ahead of them and every prospect, with a degree, of a good job which will enable them to pay their debts off.

"But potential mature students may include people out of work, whose employment prospects may not be so good even after qualifications. Others are likely also to have bigger financial commitments already, like mortgages and other borrowing, and may be less willing to take on more.

"When everyone is trying to promote the idea of lifelong learning, the figures for mature students seem a bit of a blow."

The higher education minister, Baroness Blackstone, said the figures for the younger age group showed they understood the fairness of the Government's proposals on fees.

"They clearly recognise that higher education will be a good investment for them," she added.

She said that older applicants were more likely to apply after the initial December 15 deadline, on which the Ucas statistics were based.

The figures also showed a 15 per cent drop in applications for teacher training courses.

Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman, said: "Ministers have announced more money for recruiting teachers to raise standards of literacy and numeracy in our schools, yet by introducing tuition fees, they are driving away would-be applicants in droves."

School warning on force guide

TEACHERS were told this week to ignore guidelines allowing them to use "reasonable force" to restrain violent or disobedient pupils, *writes John Carvel*.

Ministers have issued legal advice that staff could respond to classroom crises with appropriate physical intervention. This could include "holding, pushing, pulling, leading a pupil by the arm, or shepherding a pupil away by placing a hand in the centre of his or her back".

But Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, said the official advice could lead his members to take unnecessary risks.

"The danger is that teachers will feel encouraged by this guidance to intervene in dangerous situations. That is when they are at their greatest risk of assault." Instead of intervening, teachers should summon help.

The guidelines, published on Monday, were prepared by a team at the Department for Education and Employment to combat a misperception that the Children Act outlawed all forms of physical contact with pupils.

Ministers thought they could help teachers by distinguishing between improper contact and legitimate measures to restrain children.

The guidelines say: "It is unlawful for a teacher to physically punish a pupil, regardless of the seriousness of the pupil's misbehaviour, or the degree of provocation." But reasonable force could be used to prevent pupils committing a criminal offence, causing injury, damaging property, persistently disrupting lessons, or causing a serious nuisance outside the classroom.

Senior government sources said the guidelines would help teachers to understand their legal rights.

New curbs on child labour

Seumas Milne and Michael White

CHILDREN are working for up to 29 hours a week during school term-time and being paid hourly rates of as little as 33p, a survey by the Low Pay Unit has found.

A quarter of the 1,000 schoolchildren questioned who said they were employed were below the minimum working age of 13, and nearly half had suffered some kind of injury at work during the past year.

The junior health minister, Paul Boateng, unveiled a package of juvenile employment reforms, including a maximum working week, after Chris Pond, Labour MP for Gravesham and a low-pay specialist, won widespread support in the Commons for a private member's bill to protect children from exploitation and excessive work. Mr Pond agreed to withdraw his measure following the Government's action, which adopts many of his proposals.

Mr Pond had told MPs that 40 per cent of school-age children have some form of paid employment and 1.5 million work illegally without work permits or in jobs explicitly ruled out for children. "Analysis by the Child Accident Prevention Trust ... found that more than one-third of children in employment are involved in an accident at work," he said.

The Government's blueprint sets maximum working hours at different levels for term-time weekdays and weekends and for work during school holidays. The number of permissible hours for 13 and 14-year-olds would be less than those aged 15 and over. The blueprint also compels councils to draw up a list of jobs that those aged 13 will be permitted to do.

War is not an easy option

IS IT diplomacy or camouflage? Is there really a negotiable solution to the Iraq crisis, as the United Nations Secretary-General still hopes? Or do the latest moves, energetically promoted by Britain, merely amount to diplomatic cover while the war machine grinds into place?

President Chirac believes a diplomatic solution "technically" within reach. But top Clinton administration officials continue to say that they see "no answer" to the impasse. The United States Defence Secretary, William Cohen, has dismissed the latest proposal for inspection of the presidential palaces as "dust . . . raised by Saddam Hussein". Such uncompromising language begins to make Britain sound like Mr Soft in a double act. Parliament needs to be reassured that Kofi Annan's plea last week to show flexibility has been listened to, and that he goes to Baghdad with a workable plan.

A British parliament — and a government which is current European Union president — would do well to view the latest crisis from a broader historical perspective than that likely to be adopted by the US. When the Gulf war was concluded six years ago, there was a chorus of agreement that it was part of the much wider Middle East problem — and that the war had created an unrepeatable chance for solving it. That chance has been dismally missed. Among the many arguments against a military strike against Iraq today is the impression it will reinforce in the Arab world that the US, and now its British ally, finds it easier to make war than peace. Parliament also needs to consider how far Britain's adherence to the US line may weaken its own independent voice.

The point was underlined by this week's report on Israel's botched assassination attempt in Amman last September. The commission of inquiry acquits Binyamin Netanyahu of any blame for a "tactical" operation that went wrong. It merely criticises the way the operation was mounted: Mossad was wrong to assume, it complains, that the poison used by its killers was "infallible". For millions of Arabs around the Middle East, the fact that an Israeli prime minister has authorised the strategy of assassination by these means in an Arab capital rings far louder than Western warnings about Saddam's future chemical warfare intentions.

Experts in Britain as well as in the Middle East are asking whether war upon Iraq will reduce or increase the chances of Saddam using such weapons — and of Israel retaliating. The highly respectable Israeli military analyst Zeev Schiff has raised doubts about Mr Netanyahu's ability to handle Israel's weapons responsibly. Whatever the results of this crisis, four Middle Eastern powers — Iran and Syria as well as Iraq and Israel — have the capability for weapons of mass destruction. Simply to demonise Saddam misses the wider dimension of arms control in this most unstable region of the post-cold war world.

Beyond the argument about Unscom and arms inspection, and the uncertainties about the outcome of any action, lies a broader strategic argument — that the credibility of the US as sole surviving superpower is at stake. Yet an action with uncertain military consequences that splits the Security Council, undermines the UN's authority, and divides the region, will not strengthen that claim. The danger is that war can come to seem the easier option: peace should remain the more rewarding, though more difficult aim.

Suharto refuses to change

IT WAS about time for Bill Clinton to have another chat on the phone with President Suharto. Last month's call from the White House told the Indonesian leader to stop coddling his greedy family and friends, and accept the International Monetary Fund deal which is supposed to rescue his country from its financial crisis. Weeks later, Indonesia is again in crisis, while Suharto is once more demonstrating his insensitivity.

Out in the small towns of Indonesia, riots over rising prices and unemployment break out every day. Many acquire an uglier edge when anger is directed against Chinese traders — a traditional target for the Muslim majority. These are minor flare-ups so far, in obscure places. They happen at Bumiayu in central Java and at Ende on the island of Flores where there were small riots last week, or at Jatiwangi in west Java where hundreds of people set fire to some Chinese shops. But they set a worrying pattern which may lead to much worse violence unless the causes of unrest are dealt with.

What is Suharto's response to his people in need of reassurance? It is to level the vague charge that unnamed groups are trying to destabilise the economy, to order his armed forces to "take stern action", to install a protégé as the new armed forces commander — and to promote his son-in-law to another key appointment. These steps have been taken just weeks ahead of a so-called election when a 1,000-member college will vote on the presidency. Suharto warns against those who, in the run-up to the election, will make complaints in the name of democracy in order to "confuse the people". There is only one candidate and his name is Suharto. Who is confusing whom?

All this takes place against a background of rekindled forest fires in Sumatra and Borneo. As if nothing had been learnt from last autumn, logging and plantation companies continue to set fires in regions already suffering from drought. The World Health Organisation in Manila is now warning that there could be a repeat of the recent disaster: tourism in the region, already affected by the financial crisis, is expected to decline even further. Indonesia's neighbours are also watching the food riots with alarm, fearful that these could provoke a flight of ethnic Chinese.

Suharto knows what his own priorities are. General Wiranto, now promoted as armed forces chief, is a trusted ex-adjutant to the president who comes from his home region. Wiranto also has ambiguous connections with civilian strong-arm gangs who parade as "upholders of discipline". Suharto's son-in-law Prabowo Subianto commanded the élite Red Berets and has a vested interest in the regime's survival. The West must ask itself if this chimes with the Indonesian people's interests and priorities.

A world that is going hungry

"FOOD IS the first thing," wrote Bertolt Brecht. "Morals follow on." So, he advised, better to make sure that those who are starving "get proper helpings when we do the carving." How to ensure adequate helpings around the world, while we carve generous portions for ourselves, remains as hard as ever in the 1990s — which happens to be, for anyone who remembers, the UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. In the small gaps between the big headlines, brief items of news continue to reflect the misery of millions. The shorter the item, it sometimes seems, the more the millions.

Emergencies do catch our attention. We have seen on TV the frozen plight of survivors from the earthquake in northern Afghanistan, where some 30,000 are desperately short of shelter, blankets and food. Even neighbouring Tajikistan has joined the aid effort. This should make us pause. Tajikistan happens to be one of the 20 poorest countries in the world. It is still recovering from a civil war in which 50,000 were killed and hundreds of thousands became refugees. The total of pledged aid for Tajikistan is still $10 million short of the target set by the UN. And it is now sending earthquake aid to Afghanistan?

While something may or may not be done to help the Afghan survivors, food is running short for 10 times their number in Tanzania — refugees from Burundi and former Zaire. A conference which opened in Dhaka last weekend, co-sponsored by Unicef and the World Health Organisation, has heard a simple statistic. Of the 16 million under-five children in Bangladesh, about 14 million are malnourished. Every day nearly 700 Bangladeshis die of acute malnutrition, most of them under the age of five. No earthquake, no civil war, just poverty and diarrhoea.

Nadine Gordimer has written of the "shameful shackles of the past" — more than a billion men, women and children in poverty across the world.* The new century, she says, is not going to be new at all if we offer only charity while maintaining the same old system of haves and have-nots. That may be a bigger threat than any putative weapon of mass destruction.

*Poverty In The Next Century, Choices (UNDP, NY 10017), January 1998

Muck-raking over Princess Di's ashes

Mark Lawson

BRITISH newspapers last week represented perhaps the worst example yet seen of the psychological condition of denial. In life, Diana, Princess of Wales, was an enthusiastic advocate of the benefits of therapy. So it is fitting, though disturbing, that she seems to have left behind her a nation in urgent need of a 12-step programme on bereavement.

Without any provocation from the calendar, newspapers frenziedly revisited her life and death last week. The Times excitedly serialised a book by two American journalists about her last days, while the Daily Mirror ran a two-day interview with Mohamed Al Fayed, promoting his own theories about the tragic weekend in Paris. Some of this activity is simply imitative, but this latest evidence of the princess's apparent publicity immortality raises important questions about the national media and psyche.

Given regrettable credibility by a newspaper still associated by many with seriousness, the American book — Death Of A Princess: An Investigation by Thomas Sancton and Scott MacLeod — seems, from the extracts the Times selected, to be less an investigation than a combination of paraphrased magazine articles from last September, Parisian chit-chat and reckless guesses.

The writers' claim that the princess might have lived if transferred more quickly to hospital — based on comments from an American specialist with no direct knowledge of her injuries — is typical of the approach. Investigative journalism — a genre which depends on the weight of its allegations — is blatantly made a matter of opinion rather than fact.

The dynamics of the world of medicine are such that a contrary opinion is always readily available. Most doctors are convinced that their colleagues are idiots. This character trait is relatively harmless within the profession, but in the hands of Sancton and MacLeod serves to debase journalism and inflame private grief.

Ideally, investigative books should establish definitive facts in a narrative which might have become mangled by newspaper haste. What Sancton and MacLeod more often do is to set down rival speculations on which they are unable to cast further light. The reader goes into the book knowing that Mohamed Al Fayed claimed to have been told Diana's final words by a hospital nurse but that others dismiss this claim. The book presents the encounter between Al Fayed and the nurse as unchallenged fact, yet the writers offer no second source for this story.

Seeking credibility solely through insistent repetition, Al Fayed told the nurse story again in his Daily Mirror interviews, adding the claim that his son had become engaged to the princess, and his belief that the couple were murdered to prevent cultural embarrassment to the royal family.

He is far less culpable than Sancton and MacLeod in that his motive for spreading dubious theories is not money but deep despair. His paranoia is easy to understand. In his mind, there is a pattern of shadowy establishment forces seeking to deny him those British things he wanted: Harrods, a UK passport and, finally and most brutally, a royal daughter-in-law. We can see why he believes what he believes. But his Mirror mischief — and the Sancton/MacLeod book to which he contributed — touches importantly on the question of why so many others believe alternative versions of the Diana car-crash.

The modern popularity of conspiracy theories has been attributed to the approaching millennium or the decline of belief in God. But another significant cause of late-20th century credulity has been the collapse in editorial authority.

Increased commercial competition has brought pressure for rapid transmission and the resultant spreading of information — half-fact, no fact, innuendo, gossip — which has nothing to commend it as journalism other than no other news outlet has got it. As demonstrated spectacularly in the White House sex scandal, if one media source tries to delay a story for old-fashioned verification, it will soon emerge from a rival one or through the Internet. The current Diana books and articles are products of the same low-fact culture.

But the princess's media afterlife also suggests psychosis, and specifically those disturbing stories about the bereaved who continue to behave as if their loved one were still present, laying two places for breakfast, telling the day's news to an empty armchair.

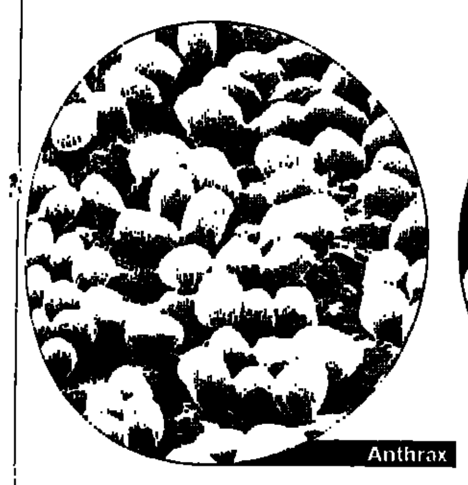
DODI Al Fayed's grieving father and a gullible, mawkish public deserve some sympathy, for they are at least mainly sincere in their delusions. But the behaviour of the Times and Daily Mirror is the most tawdry form of mourning: commercial denial, opportunistic sobbing. Just beginning to come to terms with the loss of the central character in their editorial soap opera, they suddenly understood that, even dead, she could remain a major player on their pages. The answer lay in re-runs.

Last week, the news agendas of American supermarket magazines and once serious newspapers — a decade ago, at opposite ends of the shelf — further merged. Still more disturbingly, this coverage has revealed the illogical and hypocritical attitude to privacy which seems now to have been adopted.

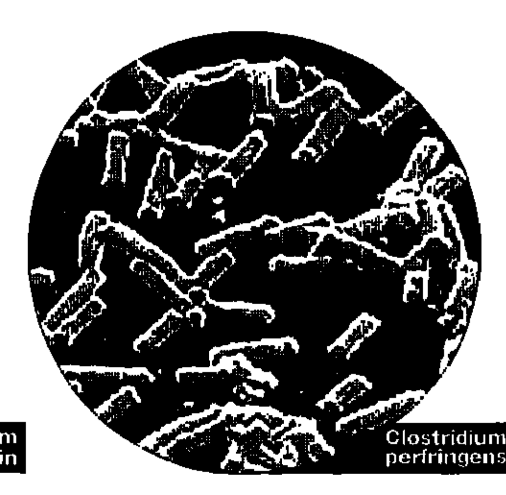
While unauthorised pictures of the princess's sons remain outlawed, there seems to be a strange assumption that words are unable to hurt or disturb. Imagine what it must be like for one of the princess's close relatives, particularly the young, to face front-pages asking "Could she have lived?" — a question recklessly answered in the affirmative on a two-page spread inside. What does this pointless tantalising achieve?

If there is one pleasing aspect of this money-grubbing publishing seance, it is that the one journalistic group unable to benefit from it are the paparazzi, a group still implicated at the very least in harassment in the final days of the princess's life. They alone are unable to disguise her absence from their work. The editors and writers, unfortunately, can just fake it.

Inside Saddam's deadly biological armoury



Botulinum toxin



Rotavirus

United Nations and Western intelligence reports say these are some of the biological and chemical weapons that Iraq has produced since it began its bio-chemical weapons programme in 1985.

Anthrax

Iraq has acknowledged making 2,265 US gallons of anthrax, which could in theory kill billions of people. Its spores at first cause flu-like symptoms and fatigue, followed by severe chest congestion. It can lie dormant for several days; in its second phase it assaults the kidneys, liver and lungs. It is fatal in 80 per cent of cases.

Botulinum toxin

Iraq has acknowledged producing 3,117 US gallons of this toxin, which could wipe out the world's population several times. The bacterium is normally found in contaminated food; it produces a highly toxic substance that causes blurred vision, a dry mouth, difficulty in swallowing or speaking, and weakness. Paralysis, respiratory failure and death can follow (30 per cent die).

Aflatoxin

Iraq produced nearly 2,000 litres of aflatoxin agent in its Agricultural and Water Resources Research Centre at Fudaiyah, on the outskirts of Baghdad. Aflatoxin destroys the immune system in animals and is carcinogenic to humans. It often turns up in moulds that grow on nuts; Iraq is a large producer of pistachio nuts.

Clostridium perfringens

Iraq produced hundreds of litres of clostridium perfringens at its Al Hakum centre, southwest of Baghdad. The US destroyed Al Hakum in 1996. The UN says this bacterium, a common source of food poisoning, was also developed at Iraq's Salman Pak research centre. It forms spores that can live in soil, and can cause gas gangrene when it finds its way into open battlefield wounds. Gas gangrene produces pain and swelling as the infected area swells with gas; later it causes shock, jaundice and death.

And if that's not enough . . .

Apart from the highly toxic VX nerve agent which Iraq used against Kurds in 1988, the UN believes Iraq has been studying the deadly virus camelpox, haemorrhagic conjunctivitis, and human rotavirus (a common cause of severe diarrhoea among children).

They are microscopic but lethal. **David Fairhall**, **Richard Norton-Taylor** and **Tim Radford** report on the threat from the proliferation of such weapons

A NAGGING fear lurks behind the mounting threats to bomb the remnants of Saddam Hussein's military machine: that a missile hidden somewhere in the Iraqi desert could dump tons of nerve gas or deadly anthrax spores on the population of Tel Aviv, or a dozen other cities within range.

True, it is only a remote possibility. Far more remote than it seemed during the 1991 Gulf war, when the Scuds actually were falling on Tel Aviv and Riyadh.

But Saddam has shown he has no qualms about gassing his enemies, even his own citizens. Years of painstaking United Nations inspections have failed to account for at least two of the Iraqi Scud missiles not used in the Gulf war. And, as an intelligence assessment from Whitehall revealed last week, the UN inspection body, Unscom, simply does not know how many usable chemical or biological warheads lie hidden. Only in the past few months, according to the British Defence Secretary, George Robertson, a hitherto unmentioned chemical weapon — Agent 15 — has been identified in large quantities.

Whatever the real threat, it is plausible enough to send Israelis once more running for their gas masks. Elsewhere, scientists and intelligence agents — who for years have been emphasising the threat of nuclear proliferation — are turning their attention to the dangers of chemical and biological (CB) warfare.

The reason is simple. In the words of Professor Paul Rogers, head of the department of peace studies at Bradford university, "nuclear weapons are far more difficult to produce than chemical and biological weapons. Any country with a reasonable agricultural industry can modify their sprays and dusts very easily to make CB weapons."

Also, as Unscom's experience in Iraq has shown, it is more difficult for states to hide their nuclear procurement activities than their CB warfare capability.

John Deutch, then CIA director, warned in 1996 that the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons in the hands of states and terrorist groups was "the most urgent, long-term pressing intelligence challenge that we face . . . The materials and expertise necessary to build chemical and biological weapons are more readily available today than ever before".

But it is one thing to produce CB weapons, quite another to devise effective delivery systems. According to Unscom, Iraqi scientists have been conducting experiments to find out the most viable warheads and missiles to deliver CB agents. One problem they would face is how to disperse the agent without it burning up on impact or when a missile re-enters the Earth's atmosphere.

Iraq has been experimenting with pilotless aircraft and a specially adapted MiG 21. Ten pilotless drones were discovered after the Gulf war in a bomb shelter at the headquarters of the Nair State Establishment for Mechanical Industries.

But Saddam's Iraq has not restricted itself to experiments. In March 1988, it used chemical weapons against its own citizens, when the Kurdish town of Halabja was attacked by aircraft; an estimated 8,000 civilians died. The Iraq-Iran war also gave an opportunity to use gas to deadly effect on the battlefield. Now, according to Western intelligence sources, Iraq is even exporting the technology: last month they claimed that Iraqi scientists were helping Libya develop a biological-weapons programme, based at the innocuous-sounding General Health Laboratories near Tripoli. Libya is alleged to have turned to Iraq for dual-use equipment — also used in agriculture and health services — which it can no longer get from the West.

Biological and chemical weapons are nothing new. Romans poisoned wells by dropping corpses down them, an early form of area-denial. In 1346, the Tatars catapulted plague-infested corpses into the walled city of Kaffa and shortened what looked to be a long siege. Some historians argue that this may also have brought the Black Death to Europe.

Britain has not been averse to developing such weapons. During the first world war, Britain stockpiled 5 million cattlecakes infected with anthrax to drop on German cattle if the Kaiser's scientists used biological weapons. At the close of the war, British, American and Canadian teams worked on an "anti-personnel" anthrax bomb which was never made. In fact, the Germans had already discovered — with mustard gas and chlorine attacks — that some weapons were simply too indiscriminate to be trusted.

Anthrax is an old enemy, mostly threatening those who handle animals, or animal products such as hides. But a warehouse full of the stuff can be a health hazard behind your own lines. In 1979, 96 people fell sick and 64 died in an anthrax outbreak in Sverdlovsk, in the former USSR. The Russians at the time said it arose from contaminated meat. Later, it became clear that there had been an explosion in a military biological-weapons facility nearby.

The Japanese during the second world war conducted a series of experiments in the notorious Camp 731 in Manchuria: they tested prisoners with botulism, encephalitis, typhoid, smallpox and 16 other microbes. After the war, the United States developed weapons that used anthrax, yellow fever, tularemia, brucellosis and other fevers, plus diseases designed to hit crops.

THE military disadvantages of bio-chemical weapons — a danger to one's own troops as well as the enemy's — led to agreements to limit their use. The use of gas on the battlefield was outlawed under agreements dating back to the horrors of mustard gas during the first world war.

A Biological Weapons Convention was signed in 1972 by the US, the USSR and the UK. Yet the convention has not proved wholly successful: a 1993 assessment by a US Congressional office declared that Iran, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Syria, North Korea and Taiwan could have undeclared offensive biological-warfare programmes.

The Chemical Weapons Convention took a lot longer, held back by mistrust between Washington and Moscow. It did not finally come into force until April 1997. Destroying the old weapons was always going to be slow, difficult and expensive. And by that time disillusionment had set in as to how far the arms-control regime could really reach.

But what alarmed the strategic analysts was the combination of rapidly proliferating ballistic missiles, especially the ubiquitous Soviet-built Scuds, and warheads potentially filled with anthrax or VX nerve agent. Syria, for example, is not seeking nuclear weapons as far as we know. But it does have chemical weapons, and plenty of Scuds at its disposal.

The great concern nowadays, however, is not simply the use of such weapons by a rogue state such as Iraq. There is increasing concern about the threat from terrorist groups. CB weapons used against targets, either carefully chosen or at random, cannot be controlled by conventional military action.

The first large-scale chemical-weapons attack by a non-state group took place in March 1995 in Tokyo. Members of the Aum Shinrikyo religious sect released sarin nerve gas on the subway system, killing 12 and injuring 5,500. A droplet of sarin on the skin, or inhaled, renders the victim incapable, and soon dead. The sect had attracted a number of experienced scientists who, according to Japanese police investigators, were also experimenting with a number of other substances, including anthrax.

It could have been worse. In 1992, the head of the Aum cult went to Zaire, ostensibly to help Ebola virus victims — but a US Senate report says it was to get samples. Ninety per cent of Ebola victims die, horribly, within a week.

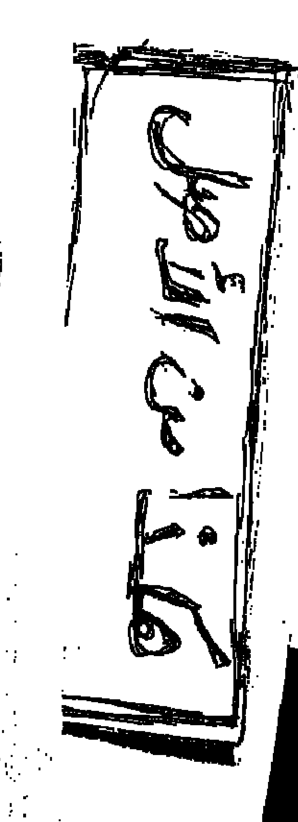
Dr Alistair Hay, a microbiologist at Leeds university, began warning of bio-weapons in terrorists' hands more than 20 years ago. But even the convention's signatories contain rogue forces. "One thing that staggered me was the biological-warfare work on plague going on in Russia in 1992," he said. "The government was saying one thing, and the KGB was running a different operation. One wondered how much control some of these countries have over different rogue outfits."

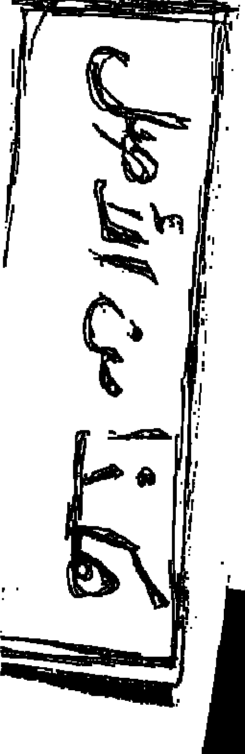
If that is worrying, there is worse to come. The new science of genetic engineering raises a hazard to yet higher notches: the fear is that unscrupulous scientists could engineer even more lethal poisons or more virulent microbes. Yet work is going on, everywhere in the world, on the re-engineering of microbes for commercial and medical reasons. How can governments detect evil manipulation at literally microscopic scales?

Iraq is not alone

The US is trying to decommission its own chemical past. It had these chemical-weapons stockpile storage sites at the end of 1995 (agent tons).

Umatilla, Oregon **3,717**
Tooele, Utah **13,616**
Pueblo, Colorado **2,611**
Newport, Indiana **1,269**
Edgewood, Maryland **1,624**
Blue Grass, Kentucky **523**
Anniston, Alabama **2,253**
Pine Bluff, Arkansas **3,849**
Johnston Atoll (Pacific Ocean southwest of Hawaii) **1,134**
Hawaii not to scale





GUARDIAN WEEKLY
February 22 1998

Meet the new world government

Multinationals will be able to take governments to court under a new agreement to be finalised this week. What happened to democracy, asks **David Rowan**

YOU may not have heard of a new international accord called the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. There's no reason why you should have: the MAI has been debated over the past three years in extraordinary secrecy, and none of the parties to it has been keen to publicise the process.

But if you have ever reflected on the growing power of the transnational corporations, and feared that at some stage national governments might be forced to bow to their chief executives' demands, you ought to inform yourself that the moment has arrived: we are about to cede to international investors some of our more fundamental democratic rights.

Representatives from the world's 29 richest countries gathered in Paris last weekend to put the final touches to an agreement that will give multinationals power to sue national governments for any profits lost through laws which discriminate against them. It will put at risk international UN treaties on climate change and over-fishing, and will threaten workplace and environmental legislation we have elected politicians to enact. More crucially, it will acknowledge for the first time that corporate capital now has more authority and freedom to act than mere national and local governments.

The MAI is a comprehensive accord being finalised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) designed to give international investors a "level playing field". It amounts to a new set of investment rules that would grant corporations the right to buy, sell and move their operations wherever they wish around the world, without government regulation. This new investor freedom, the OECD says, will give a new impetus to growth, employment and higher living standards.

The agreement, being prepared for signature by OECD ministers in April, is a logical extension of existing international trade treaties such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Gatt) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta). But more than those, it seeks to create a world where capital can move entirely free of restriction. As Renato Ruggerio, director-general of the World Trade Organisation, put it: "We are writing the constitution of a single global economy."

The trouble, according to the increasing numbers of groups campaigning against the accord, is that this constitution's bill of rights extends only as far as the investors. It was initiated by business organisations — 477 of the Fortune Global 500 companies are based in OECD countries — in order to make international investment easier. More than 85 per cent of the world's foreign direct investment (known as FDI) flows out from OECD nations, increasingly to developing countries. And the amount is rising rapidly (see panel, below): as business grows more global, FDI is growing faster than trade flows.

Currently, investors are concerned that they cannot compete on equal terms with nationals of a host country. So the MAI was designed according to three key principles: non-discrimination (foreign investors cannot be treated worse than domestic companies); no entry restrictions (signatories cannot refuse any form of foreign investment, including the purchase of privatised companies, in any sector apart from defence); and an absence of special conditions (such as to ensure local employment or control currency speculation). "Investment" is defined broadly, to extend to intellectual property, real estate and shares. Once a country signs, it cannot withdraw for five years and will be bound by the agreement for 15 years.

In the case of any breach, a multinational can take the offending national or local government to an international tribunal. There it can sue for past and potential future damages.

Non-governmental organisations — and so far more than 600 from 67 countries have united to oppose it — warn that the MAI will make your vote irrelevant. They talk of "supercitizens", corporations freed from the normal citizens' obligations to the environment or to workers.

They point to an early concrete example of the anti-democratic legal actions likely to result. Last April, the Canadian government banned a petrol additive called MMT, which Canada considers to be a dangerous toxin. The additive's sole manufacturer in Canada is Ethyl Corporation, which responded by filing a $251 million lawsuit against the government to cover losses resulting from the "expropriation" of its MMT production plant and its "good reputation". The case, brought under clauses in Nafta, is still in progress, but even now it is not an isolated one. Two Mexican local authorities are also being sued under Nafta clauses by United States companies prevented from establishing toxic-waste dumps in their jurisdictions.

Many nations have laws which will run into direct conflict with the MAI's requirements. As drafted, the agreement will override the following states' laws:

Australia
Requires foreign investors taking a substantial stake in an existing Australian business worth A$5 million, or establishing a new one worth A$10 million, to submit to a screening based upon a "national interest" test.

Taiwan
Forbids foreign investment in "highly polluting industries".

US
Some states restrict non-residents' use of public land for grazing and for mineral, oil and gas extraction.

Mexico
Bars foreign ownership of development-banking institutions and credit unions.

Canada
Requires a "benefits plan" to encourage the employment of Canadians, and offer opportunities for Canadian contractors, before approving foreign investment in the oil and gas sectors.

Venezuela
Limits the number of foreign employees in companies with more than 10 workers to 10 per cent, with a 20 per cent payroll limit for foreign employees.

Colombia
Bars foreign investment in the processing or disposal of toxic or radioactive waste not produced in Colombia.

New Zealand
Requires approval for foreign direct investment that results in control of "significant" assets, such as businesses worth more than NZ$10 million.

Chile
Bars the repatriation of capital until one year after a foreign investment is made.

Signatories to the MAI will also face such actions, held in special international courts, should corporate lawyers identify breaches. "The MAI creates a precedent that elevates the rights of companies over the democratic rights of citizens," according to the World Development Movement. The group is warning that UK local authorities, for instance, would be prevented from campaigning against South African wine, as many did during the anti-apartheid boycotts of the 1980s. The South African vintners would simply sue for compensation. Those local battles to stop McDonald's opening a branch — such as is currently happening in Bermuda — would stand no chance.

AND what of a national government that decided to prevent an international press baron from pricing his newspapers below cost? Rupert Murdoch's lawyers may well claim that such a strategy sought to discriminate against the multinational News Corporation.

Even the OECD's own guide to the MAI admits that, "as with all binding international agreements, this will moderate the exercise of national authority to some degree".

Then there are the environmental implications. MAI would, according to Friends of the Earth, let companies oppose the Kyoto agreement, under which industrial countries gave developing countries "climate-friendly" technology in return for pollution rights: for such rights would be an anti-competitive subsidy. Similarly, the MAI could challenge the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, designed to protect developing countries' genetic resources, as foreign multinationals demand equal access to such resources.

The greatest concern comes from those who represent developing countries. They will be invited to sign the agreement when completed, but without having influenced its content. And they will find it hard to resist signing if they want the investment that many consider vital: of the $112 billion invested in developing countries in 1995, more than 80 per cent ended up in just 12 countries. The 48 least developed (with 10 per cent of world population) attracted just 0.5 per cent of global investment. Yet being "in" will open them up as unlimited new markets for cigarette companies, infant-formula marketers, and those seeking to exploit forests and minerals.

There are, however, indications that the growing opposition to the MAI may be strong enough to postpone its signing. NGOs have made the issue a priority: according to Nick Mabey, economic policy officer for World Wildlife Fund, "this is bigger now than global warming. Type in 'MAI' on the Web, and you'll get more than 1,000 sites — virtually none in favour, apart from the OECD sites."

There are also increasing concerns among the signatories themselves. The US, in particular, has sought many exemptions to protect federal and state governments. Organised labour, too, is concerned that the agreement will override workers' rights. French film-makers and musicians protested this week amid fears that France and the European Union would have to offer the same creative subsidies to Hollywood under the deal.

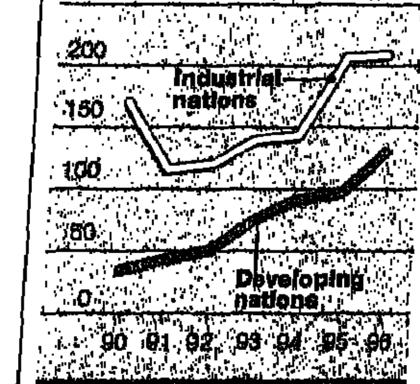
Herman van Karnebeek, deputy chairman of the Dutch chemicals group Akzo Nobel, who heads the OECD business and industry advisory committee, said last month: "We now hear of disturbing signs that many of the elements we were hoping for may not be possible. What then, is in the MAI for us?"

The NGOs believe they can now exploit the growing divisions. "There's a lot of tension in every European government between the environment and development people and the trade people," says Mabey. He believes concerned citizens should lobby their governments to urge a delay in negotiations. "The decision to rush it through was taken in 1995, but most of those [Tory] ministers are not around now, so there's no political faith to be lost in delaying."

Investors' chronicle

Governments prize inward investment and the promise of jobs and growth that it brings. For multinationals, locating worldwide allows them to overcome trade barriers and compete globally. Foreign direct investment (FDI) flows have doubled as a share of global output since the 1970s. The biggest recipients of FDI continue to be rich countries. Most FDI to the developing world goes to middle-income countries — in 1996 only $5 billion went to Sub-Saharan Africa. Poverty combined with political and social turmoil does not appeal to investors. — *Charlotte Denny*

FDI inflows, US$billion



In Brief

THE Bank of England warned of a rise in interest rates in the coming months, despite news that the Government had hit its target of 2.5 per cent inflation. Industry figures appealed to the Bank to think again after five months of declining output in manufacturing and a deteriorating outlook for exporters.

THE Republic of Ireland has become Europe's fastest growing economy, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Real output has risen by almost a quarter in the past three years with more jobs created than in the previous 30 years.

THE European Commission has launched an investigation into the high costs of calls to and from mobile phones which, in some cases, can be up to 14 times more than those between fixed telephone networks.

A HUGE recruitment drive is under way at British Airways as a generation of pilots who joined in the 1960s reaches retirement age. The usual intake of 100 pilots a year will rise to between 200 and 300. Many recruits will have to be trained from scratch.

PLANS to create the world's biggest accountancy firm collapsed when Ernst and Young and KPMG called off merger talks amid accusations that regulatory scrutiny had proved a stumbling block.

AIRBUS has put back until autumn 2004 the entry into service of its new 600-seat aeroplane designed to compete with Boeing's 747 series.

MONSANTO, the US chemical giant, criticised for its genetically modified soya beans, is aiming to expand its activities through the takeover of a leading US seed company, DeKalb.

THORN'S chief executive Mike Metcalf resigned after a profit warning wiped $49 million off the value of shares.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates February 16	Sterling rates February 9
Australia	2.4669-2.4698	2.4280-2.4331
Austria	20.94-20.96	20.83-20.85
Belgium	61.45-61.54	61.11-61.21
Canada	2.3650-2.3669	2.324-2.3447
Denmark	11.34-11.35	11.28-11.29
France	9.98-9.99	9.92-9.93
Germany	2.9775-2.9796	2.9611-2.9697
Hong Kong	12.67-12.68	12,63-12 64
Ireland	1.1935-1.1958	1.1802-1.1822
Italy	2,937-2,940	2,925-2,929
Japan	206.30-206.56	202 95-203.22
Netherlands	3,3561-3.3586	3.3383-3.3413
New Zealand	2.8394-2.8441	2.7949-2.800
Norway	12.39-12.40	12.34-12.36
Portugal	304.82-305.11	303.12-303.47
Spain	252.35-252.54	250.94-251.26
Sweden	13.26-13.28	13.24-13.26
Switzerland	2.3946-2.3975	2.3875-2.3908
USA	1.6376-1.6392	1.6329-1.6338
ECU	1.5060-1.5076	1.5028-1.5041

FTSE100 Share index up 19 at 5818.9. FTSE 250 Index up 13.6 at 4991.9. Gold up [illegible] at [illegible]

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
February 22 1998

Corsicans vent outrage at assassination

Dominique Le Guilledoux tests the popular mood after the murder of the island's French prefect

IN THE biggest street demonstration Corsica has ever seen, some 30,000 people — or more than one in 10 of the island's population — marched silently and without banners through the streets of Ajaccio and Bastia on February 11. They were protesting against the murder of the prefect, Claude Erignac, by gunmen last week and against the violence used by the Mafia and by nationalists seeking independence from France.

The marchers in Ajaccio were headed by nine children holding hands and the 15 women who formed the Manifesto for Life group in 1995 in response to violence on the island.

One of the marchers was Eliane, a shop assistant. "I don't see how Corsica can be saved," she said. "The Mafiosi are here — that's never been a secret. We used to keep quiet about it. They killed each other and it wasn't anything to do with us. Now we're all realising something has to be done. The problem is that a lot of people benefit from the system. They themselves know things have to change. But how? We're going to get a new prefect. He's described as a good sheriff who'll sort everything out. Nobody believes he will — that would be too good to be true."

Antoine, a 34-year-old manager, was convinced that, unless the government realised the magnitude of the challenge, its Corsica policy would "lie in ruins". A friend of his, Jean-Pierre, who runs a graphics business, believed that there could be no solution unless the rule of law was imposed. "The trouble is that everyone knows the Mafia has links with the [neo-Gaullist] RPR party. That's why [Jacques] Chirac's visit to Corsica was such a joke. Why does the name of Charles Pasqua [a former RPR interior minister] constantly keep on cropping up in conversations here?

"I can't wait to see the kind of rule of law they've been promising: it'll mean more parking tickets and stiffer VAT checks on small companies. The bigger fish will be left alone. Sometimes I wish I was dishonest. I know I couldn't be, but it's become so easy here. In the course of my work I see guys who owe the state millions of francs, and they're left alone.

"Even our honest politicians — and there are some — are constantly being threatened. Imagine the pressure they're under. Sometimes they have to be a bit accommodating. That's the way it is. When the president of the executive of the Corsican assembly goes home and finds his dog has been impaled, what can you call that if not intimidation? Naples and Palermo can't teach us anything." Jean-Pierre was touched to learn that the anti-Mafia mayor of Palermo had put his city hall's flag at half mast on hearing that Erignac had been shot.

Two nurses, Martine and Françoise, were equally disgusted: "There aren't any rules any more. Nobody knows who is who or who does what any more. All we know is that some very big interests are at stake. It would already be something if we were entitled to hear the truth." They said they tried to live normal lives, to forget, and to enjoy some of the pleasures Corsica has to offer: "One moment you're skiing and the next eating sea urchins on the beach."

They did not believe in local politics: "There are people in politics who are in fact batting for others. We don't get involved in their dirty tricks, and if we did we know what would happen. It's almost a habit now — we've become passive. Things have changed: in the old days they used to bump each other off, but nowadays people like us could become targets."

Félix, a builder, was angry at the situation: "We work our fingers to the bone and pay our tax. I had to sell my flat to keep my head above water. Look how the names of notorious gangsters have recently started appearing on electoral lists. One of them even got it into his head he was about to enter parliament — and I get into trouble because I'm behind with my VAT payments. The whole thing is completely crazy.

"In the old days we understood the nationalists' cause. We're all very Corsican. Look at I Muvrini [a best-selling group of traditional Corsican singers]: they managed to get their kicks by other means — music."

Anne-Catherine agreed: "If the nationalists had been democratic, they would have swept the board. We all know they missed their big chance with the Joxe plan [in 1988]. It was on the point of succeeding: the move to democracy was going to take place, it had the backing of ordinary people, and they were in a position to modernise everything."

An Ajaccio theatre manager said: "Initiatives here are blocked. Decisions are dictated by fear, even in the upper echelons of the administration: when it finances something, it gives money basically to keep people quiet — it's a way of calming things down, of playing it by ear.

"When someone has an economic or cultural project, no one believes in it. People say: it won't work because it has never worked. We're caught up in a process of negative memory. Down the years, we have all, in one way or another, become filled with a kind of hatred.

"I'm a quiet sort of guy. I liked the prefect a lot, and his murder was unspeakable. But I remember once getting the urge to break up the furniture during a meeting with him. It surprised me and made me think. There's such a sense of deadlock in Corsica that people fall into one or other of two traps: violence or apathy — a collective inability to get things done."

Other demonstrators wondered how to keep alive the mood that had brought together so many people, irrespective of their political opinions, to demand that violence should end and the law be enforced.

ONE man said: "Would they please stop treating us like idiots and organising a media circus, complete with spectacular arrests, to make people believe they're doing something. When Chirac says: 'We shall not tolerate it', perhaps he should first ask his former government why it allowed the Tralonca press conference to take place [600 heavily armed and hooded nationalists met the press at a nocturnal rendezvous in 1995] under the noses of gendarmes who didn't lift a finger.

"He should ask why the men who opened fire on the police at Spéronne golf course were arrested and then released. I thought the police were supposed to uphold law and order. You can hardly expect people not to get the idea that anything goes, and that the best way of asserting oneself is to be strong, armed and delinquent."

Another man wondered if, what with all the confusion and tension, the general apathy and the government's ambiguous role, Corsica was not entering an "Algerian syndrome without actually realising it". But then he had second thoughts: "But no, that would be going too far."

After the silent march broke up, people at last started talking to each other, as the sun went down over the sea. Everyone felt rather relieved. "But for how long?" one woman asked.

(February 13)

Peaceful protest . . . but many islanders are growing impatient for action to curb corruption on Corsica PHOTOGRAPH: GEORGES GOBET

US sees silver lining to the cloud over Asia

Erik Izraelewicz

IS THE financial crisis that has swept Asia the result of an American conspiracy? Many South Koreans and Thais who have suddenly been plunged into a terrible economic depression have no doubt that it is. Their argument goes that, threatened by economies that had become too big for their boots, the United States decided to call a halt to their insolent growth. Expressed in equally undiplomatic terms, the idea that the whole thing was a plot hatched by Washington has also gained currency in Europe, and particularly in France. Is there any truth in it?

What can be ruled out from the start is that a group of conspirators — politicians or speculators in New York or Washington — decided to bring down the Asian currencies like dominoes and thus halt the long period of growth that those countries have enjoyed. It is a convenient argument, and has been extensively exploited by some political leaders in the region to draw a veil over their own responsibility for the present crisis, which is considerable. But the argument does not square with the facts. Conspiracies do not affect economics. The search for a scapegoat is man's favourite sport.

But the quiet confidence displayed by US business leaders at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, the spectacular rise and rise of Wall Street, and a bullish declaration by Janet Yellen, chief economic adviser to the White House, do prompt the question: who stands to gain from the Asian financial crisis?

By admitting that the crisis might eventually turn out to be a "positive factor" for the US, Yellen bolstered — no doubt unintentionally — the arguments of those who believe in the conspiracy theory.

The sudden collapse of Asian currencies, the slump on stock markets in the region and the sharp decline in growth will, of course, initially result in considerable losses for both the US and other leading industrial countries. The Americans have lost capital as their investments have evaporated and their markets in Asia have disappeared.

Southeast Asian markets account for a greater slice of American exports than they do of European goods. And the Americans have lost their competitive edge: benefiting from the devaluation of Asian currencies, products from the region will pose a formidable threat to US companies.

But the Asian crisis also presents some far from negligible advantages for Washington. It came at a particularly opportune time, averting the risk of the economy overheating and easing the inflationary pressures that were threatening the country. It triggered a fall in the world prices of energy and raw materials which helped ease the pressure on prices in the US.

Big investors have repatriated their capital to the safety of the US, which has led to downward pressure on long-term US interest rates. As a result, the Federal Reserve, which was considering raising rates, has not found it necessary to do so.

But the effects of the crisis are not purely macroeconomic. American companies have already identified the advantages they may gain from it. The devaluation of Asian currencies and the increased competitiveness resulting from that has once again forced US companies to step up their efforts to innovate and become more productive. And they are delighted: Jack Welch, head of General Electric, the biggest industrial group in the US, told the magazine Fortune that the crisis was a great "opportunity".

What is more, the crisis will offer giant US corporations new growth prospects in the affected countries. The International Monetary Fund, with Washington's backing, has everywhere demanded and obtained the opening up of markets to foreign capital, particularly American, in many areas from finance to automobiles.

Asian firms are up for sale — and at bargain prices. "Some companies are today worth 1 per cent of what they were worth two years ago," says Kenneth Curtis, an economist with Deutsche Bank in Tokyo.

US companies are ideally placed in the scramble for bargains: after years of megaprofits, they are awash in cash. The Asian crisis has also helped to increase the gulf between US banks, already the most powerful in the world, and their European and Asian counterparts.

After getting their fingers burnt during the Latin American crisis of the eighties, US banks adopted a much more cautious policy than that taken by European and Japanese institutions: their commitments in Asia are relatively modest.

Even if the conspiracy theory has no foundation, it is worth asking who stands to benefit or to lose from the Asian crisis. On the face of it, the US, the world's biggest economic power, seems in a position to benefit most. But if the crisis were to continue or deepen — which cannot be ruled out — the US could find itself on the losing side.

(February 13)





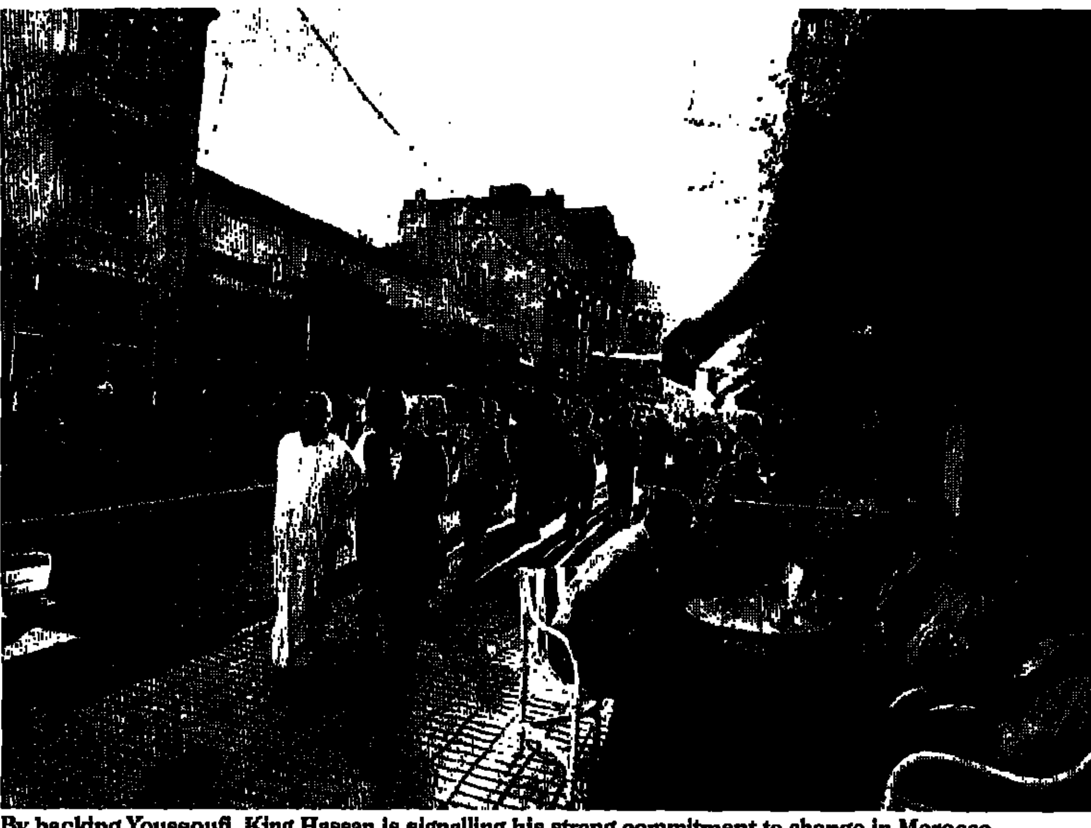
Socialists to set the agenda in Morocco

Jean-Pierre Tuquoi in Rabat

MOROCCAN socialists are not much given to triumphalism. On February 5, their French-language daily, Libération, quietly announced that the previous day King Hassan II had asked the Socialist Abderrahman Youssoufi to form Morocco's next government. The headline to the piece, squeezed between an article on Aids and a report on Iraq, was: "In the end it is Youssoufi."

Announced in a brief communiqué issued by the royal palace, the appointment of the first secretary of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) as prime minister, while not a huge surprise, nevertheless represents a political sea change.

For the first time since he came to the throne in 1961, Hassan has entrusted the running of the country to a socialist — and not any old socialist at that, but one of his longest-standing opponents, a close collaborator of Mehdi Ben Barka (who was kidnapped and murdered in Paris in 1965), and a man prepared to go to prison, or into exile, to defend his political beliefs.



By backing Youssoufi, King Hassan is signalling his strong commitment to change in Morocco

"Morocco has been changing for years," one of Hassan's advisers says. "But the arrival of the socialists is the strongest signal sent out so far. It shows that the process of change will continue to be implemented unswervingly."

Youssoufi is not a man who likes to depart from his routine: on February 5, as usual, he was at the headquarters of his party's Arabic-language daily, Al Ittihad Al Ichtiraki, in Casablanca. There he began consultations with a view to forming a coalition government whose core will be an alliance between the socialists and the centre right.

Last November's general election results, which were contested by the opposition but saw the USFP narrowly corner the largest number of seats, left Youssoufi with no choice in the matter. The lower chamber is made up of three almost equal groups of deputies from the left, right and centre.

Forming a government will not be easy, and it will take time. Youssoufi knows that the leadership of his party has so far been reluctant to open up its ranks to young cadres or women.

Certain members of the party executive fear that this backward-looking attitude may result in USFP grandees being brought into the government over the heads of better qualified candidates.

Other problems may emerge over the precise political shape of the future ruling coalition. It will include the centrist National Independents' Rally (RNI) and some small parties in the centre and on the left.

But what about Morocco's oldest political party, Istiqlal? Like all political activists of the older generation, the 74-year-old Youssoufi belonged for a time to Istiqlal. And although he left it in 1959, relations between it and the USFP have never been broken. Indeed, they form the backbone of the opposition alliance known as the Democratic Block.

Because of the long-standing bonds between the two parties, Youssoufi is reported by some sources to be keen to bring Istiqlal into the future majority. "It would be a political mistake," says a USFP member. "Istiqlal is a rightwing party and fundamentally conservative. If it joins the majority, it won't be able to get its act together — nor will the government."

Cabinet meetings, chaired by Hassan, who is flanked by his advisers, are nowadays "proper work sessions where ministers are expected to stick up for their projects", says one participant.

The present justice minister, Omar Azziman, a man with USFP sympathies and not someone normally inclined to indulgence towards the regime, says: "I've been given a free hand to implement my policies. There has never been any interference from the palace or anywhere else."

THAT would seem to square with what Hassan reportedly told Youssoufi during their private conversation on February 4: there will be no royal prerogative and no compulsory agenda. The king simply urged the future prime minister to pursue reforms already under way, notably in such areas as education and justice, not to call into question economic reforms implemented with the help of international financial institutions, and not to make the Western Sahara problem a cause of conflict between the parties or bring religion into the political arena. Hassan also asked Youssoufi to do his best to reduce social inequalities by giving priority to the fight against poverty.

Sources close to the king like to point out that "the next government will not be taking over a disaster-stricken country". It is a fact that Morocco, although endowed with few natural resources, is not a country with serious economic problems.

Pockets of modernity exist. The trouble is that they benefit only a small fraction of the population. The majority of Moroccans are excluded, and helpless to do anything about the fact that their living conditions have been steadily deteriorating over the past few years, or that their salvation often depends solely on a capricious climate.

"Unless something is done, there's bound to be an explosion of social unrest," Azziman says.

Fortunately for those who have so far failed to benefit from Morocco's development — and for the future government — this winter's abundant rainfall suggests that the country will achieve a growth rate of more than 10 per cent this year.

(February 7)

Swedish fat cats come under fire

Bruno Peltier in Stockholm

A FURIOUS row has broken out in Sweden over the lavish bonuses handed out to the bosses of leading companies when they retire. The latest person to benefit will be Lars-Aake Helgesson, the 56-year-old managing director of Stora, one of Europe's leading forestry and paper-manufacturing groups.

He will receive a retirement bonus of 12 million kronor ($1.5 million), and his retirement age has been lowered to 60 specially for his benefit. After he retires, he will still receive 55 per cent of his present annual salary of $730,000 until the age of 65, and 45 per cent of that sum thereafter.

If Helgesson lives as long as the average Swedish male (78), he will be paid a total of $7.2 million. That sum is not, however, a record: the managing directors of Volvo and Pharmacia-Upjohn were each due to net a total of $8 million after retiring, and the boss of Ericsson $11 million.

"Parachute deals", as they are known, regularly attract a lot of flak in Sweden. But people were particularly enraged by the Helgesson case because of the secrecy surrounding negotiations between him and the chairman of the board of Stora.

The chairman is none other than Bo Berggren, head of the confederation of Swedish industry and chairman of the boards of Astra and SAS, two other companies in the country's largest group, Wallenberg.

Members of the National Shareholders' Association, have called for Berggren's resignation. They feel that his generosity is particularly unwarranted because Helgesson did not improve Stora's performance during his 10-year stint as managing director.

The Social Democrat prime minister, Göran Persson, has intervened in the controversy by denouncing what he calls "the insensitivity of the private sector". The sums of money being discussed in the Helgesson case may, he argues, cause future pay negotiations to spiral out of control.

In the government's view, with growth set to dip this year, denouncing the conduct of the captains of industry eight months before a general election, which looks as if it will be a close-fought contest, can only pay dividends.

Above all, Persson wants the electorate to forget his failure in the fight against unemployment. Although the official jobless rate has been brought down to 7.3 per cent (or 289,000 out of work), that figure fails to take into account the 188,000 people on special government-financed programmes.

The episode has not improved relations between the Social Democrats and the employers. The latter have been pressing for a reduction in income tax, while at the same time enjoying one of the lowest rates of corporation tax in the European Union.

(February 8-9)

Health warning over 'dangerous solvents'

Laurence Folléa

THE toxic risks of glycol ethers, chemical solvents used in many domestic, industrial and cosmetic products, have been exercising the minds of specialists for some months. The French National Federation of Industrial Injury Victims and Handicapped Persons (Fnath) is talking about "a new public health scandal". The consumerist magazine, Que choisir?, has denounced the fact that "dangerous solvents are freely on sale".

Fnath, the magazine Santé et Travail, and two leading trade unions held a press conference recently to demand that "urgent measures" be taken. "Even in the absence of data concerning human beings, elementary precaution requires the solvents to be removed from uses that expose a wide section of workers and consumers to risk," they said.

The offending substances are widely used in water paints, varnishes, inks, household products such as window-cleaning liquid, detergents and oven cleaners, photographic developers, glues, pesticides and cosmetics. They are also employed in the steel, engineering and electronics industries.

The substances can be divided into two groups: derivatives of ethylene glycol (E series) and derivatives of propylene glycol (P series). Only those in the E series are potentially toxic. Their teratogenic nature (producing malformation of the embryo and foetus during pregnancy) has been shown in animals. It is strongly suspected they may affect humans in the same way.

A study carried out in six European regions by teams of French, Italian, Dutch and British scientists co-ordinated by the French National Health and Medical Research Institute (Inserm) found a significant increase in the risk of congenital malformation in children whose mothers had been exposed to glycol ethers in the workplace during their pregnancy.

A woman who gave birth in 1993 to a blind and hemiplegic baby with severe brain anomalies brought an action against Laboratoires Bailleul last November. During her pregnancy, she had been prescribed Bailleul's erythromycin, an antibiotic used to treat acne, which at that time contained one of the four glycol ethers classified as "substances with toxic effects on reproduction" on the list of dangerous substances and preparations drawn up by the European Union. In November 1995, France's medicines commission had requested Bailleul to stop selling its preparation, which it duly did.

A ruling last August classified four E-series glycol ethers, including 2-ethoxyethanol, as substances with toxic effects on reproduction. But the resulting ban on selling or importing such products does not include their professional use. Another ruling, banning the use of glycol ethers in cosmetics and in specially made-up medicines, is about to come into effect.

A French specialist on the subject, André Cicolella, has studied the health risks of such substances for several years. He says that "if E-series glycol ethers were replaced by those in the P series, there would be no risk".

Cicolella, who now works as a research scientist at Ineris, an institute that studies risks in the industrial environment, was sacked for "insubordination" from the National Institute for Research and Safety in May 1994 after a row with management over his research work. The subject of his research? Glycol ethers.

(January 22)

Le Monde

Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

Financial centres face Government probe

The lure of beneficial tax regimes to many investors has attracted the attention of the British authorities. **Simon Read** discovers why they're so interested

BRITAIN'S Home Secretary Jack Straw has announced a wide-ranging review of the financial systems of the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey that will examine the offshore centres' laws, systems and practices for financial services regulation and company registration.

The sub-text is that the Government has finally decided to crack down on what is claimed to be widespread money-laundering at these offshore islands. This has set the alarm bells ringing at the financial centres as they see their powers — and possibly their attractiveness to offshore investors — diminishing in the face of intervention by the Government.

Indeed, claims emanating from the Islands since the announcement all suggest that they feel they are already well regulated.

But with more than £300 billion-worth of funds on the Islands — with Jersey claiming that it is home to £230 billion alone — of which one-third comes from the UK mainland, it is hardly surprising that the Government wants to take a closer look at the beneficial tax regime. As well as low rates of personal and corporate taxation, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man have abolished value added tax, inheritance tax, and levies on capital gains.

Whatever the outcome of the Government's review, the self-governing Islands are sure to remain an attractive base for investors. The fact that finance runs ahead of tourism as their main industries tells its own story. It means that expatriates working abroad for the first time have a ready supply of expertise to help ensure that they make the most of their overseas earnings.

Sorting out the personal finances for anyone working abroad is going to prove complicated — with the Inland Revenue involved, how could it be otherwise? So it is reassuring that — notwithstanding the current question marks hanging over the Islands — there are offshore companies with years of experience of dealing with the unique needs of expatriates.

Even better news for those fresh out of Blighty is that many of these offshore companies are names you will recognise. In fact, most of the UK's biggest high-street institutions now have offshore subsidiaries, ranging from Barclays Bank to the Yorkshire Building Society.

Getting the best out of these offshore banks and investment companies is as difficult as it is at home. Shopping around is the key, and keeping up to date with the latest tax legislation and local rules is crucial.

Wherever you are in the world, you could probably use expert advice, so in this special report we cover most of the basics — from choosing a bank to picking a tax haven itself. The rest is up to you.



Watching brief: Jack Straw plans to investigate Island transactions PHOTOS: GEORGE HERRINGSHAW/DON McPHEE

Tax status

Passing the inspection

Tom Tickell

ANY expatriate coming in and out of Britain walks through a tax minefield in which one false move can eliminate all the benefits that expat status may bring.

Tax inspectors, understandably enough, are wary of granting people such status. But if you do not have it, you are obliged to pay tax in Britain on your worldwide income. The same goes for savings and investment income, too. Banks may pay interest gross in the Channel Islands but everyone who receives the income has to declare it and pay the required tax.

So the benefits of being an expat and, therefore, outside the normal taxation rules are enormous. But you only get expat status if you pass a series of stringent tests.

Until now, the concessions have derived from a mixture of case law, concessions and Inland Revenue practice. There are signs that the UK government plans to limit some of the benefits — particularly on capital gains.

The crucial point for anyone planning to work abroad for three or four years is to get professional advice. Everyone's circumstances differ and much will depend on your status. "Non resident and not ordinarily resident" is the ideal status that prospective expats should aim for — your salary will be free of British tax, and so will savings and investments. Indeed, savings institutions in Britain can pay you interest gross, once the tax year in which you leave is over.

Many families working overseas will rent out their homes in Britain on long leases to cover the period they are away. Even if you are abroad, the standard personal tax allowances apply. In the present tax year, which ends on April 5, the first £4,045 of income you receive is tax free — whatever its source.

The matching figure for husbands and wives is currently £8,090 between them. Almost inevitably, though, the figures will change in the Budget for the next tax year.

Assume that you hold the house in joint names. The first £8,090 you receive in rent will not be taxed anyway and, what's more, you can offset the cost of letting agents, managing agents, repairs and so on against tax. The big question is whether it is wise to claim mortgage tax relief through MIRAS.

"You have to make a choice," says Ellie Patsalos, tax partner at London accountants Deloitte & Touche. "You can either set your mortgage against the rent as an expense,

continued on page 8

Financial packages

Don't fall for the sucker punch

Innocents abroad eager to secure high returns on their investment are a soft target, says **Tom Tickell**

SAVING and investing offshore have particular advantages for any British expatriate. Bank deposits will pay interest in full and there will be no tax to pay in Britain, at least if you are classed as "not" resident or "not ordinarily" resident. Capital gains tax is not a worry either.

Admittedly, people who come under British tax laws can also get interest gross. But that only postpones a tax bill until after the end of the tax year. But knowing savings are safe is far more important than any tax advantage, and there have been horror stories in recent years. ... year the European Union Bank, based in Antigua, went bust, and no funds have been found so far. And in the 1980s, Gibraltar had problems emanating from the Barlow Clowes affair.

Offshore investors have had their problems, too. For example, some expats have bought worthless letters of credit in the United States; others have subscribed to diamond and whisky syndicates "where they just could not lose"; some have even put funds into ostrich investments where one promoter guaranteed 50 per cent profit in the first year — they all proved disastrous.

Small unit trusts, backed by unknown names in badly regulated areas, can also be suspect. Even well-known names such as Morgan Grenfell have had their difficulties both onshore and offshore.

"Spotting dubious offers for both savings and investment is not difficult," says Amersham-based independent financial adviser Penny O'Nions. "If the terms are way out of line with those elsewhere, you should be on your guard. Offers which look just too good to be true are as attractive as they are because they are bogus.

"It is much wiser to stick with big names, who have reputations to lose. Most British banks and building societies run offshore savings plans, and the banks and UK unit trust groups offer a mass of different investment schemes."

Standards offshore vary sharply. Those in Jersey and Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Gibraltar are high, and the same goes for Bermuda. Centres such as the Cayman islands have improved dramatically. But experienced regulators offshore advise anyone planning to put funds in the Western Pacific, centres such as Nairu and Western Samoa, to be cautious.

Territories nearer home are a different story. Jersey and Guernsey work under separate rules, but both are cautious on savings. Jersey will only allow the world's biggest 500 banks to set up branches and take deposits.

Meanwhile Guernsey has boasted an effective watchdog in the shape of its Financial Services Commission for the past 10 years.

How does the Isle of Man compare? It has its own financial regulators, covering savings and offshore funds, and formal safety nets, too. Savers in any failed bank recoup 75 per cent of the first £20,000 they have deposited. That may be lower than the 90 per cent of the equivalent sum which the British scheme promises, but it still represents a source of comfort to the anxious investor. Gibraltar meanwhile has its own regulators, and a savings protection scheme based on the British model should be in force by the middle of this year.

In terms of formal compensation schemes, Jersey's plan, along the lines of the British equivalent, guarantees the first £30,000 in full, and 90 per cent of the next £20,000 — adding up to a top limit of £48,000 per person. But couples investing in joint names can make separate claims, thereby doubling the limit. Guernsey's limits are higher, but in this case the investor is responsible for 10 per cent of the loss of the first £30,000.

The Isle of Man's investor protection scheme works along the same lines as those in Britain and Jersey but it only applies to the 16 authorised trusts. Staff claim that it covers all funds in which outside investors will be interested, excluding only those schemes designed for corporate clients. But anyone who has doubts should check. Gibraltar plans to put in place a matching protections scheme later this year.

'Financial packages that look just too good to be true are as attractive as they are because they are bogus'

However, no offshore scheme is going to compensate individuals for poor advice, whereas in Britain you can make a claim on the Investors Compensation Board if the firm has gone bust, and from the Personal Investment Authority if it is still in business.

Regulation is tight in havens such as Liechtenstein and Switzerland, but the European Commission is planning to introduce compensation arrangements for all European Union states by the end of the year.

Safety nets for savers and investors certainly make sense, but no one wants to have to use them. Sticking to big international names may be the best way to protect yourself. Another sound principle is to restrict yourself to the well regulated territories.

Vast floods of money wash round the world's financial systems, looking for a home. Many of its owners, evading tax or dealing in drugs, are keen to remain anonymous, so the opportunities for potential fraudsters are enormous. As a result, savers and investors offshore need to be on their guard as never before.

Building societies

For the best rates, the feeling is mutual

Offshore operations offer better packages than their onshore parents, as **Rachel Baird** discovered

FOR expatriates seeking a tax-free, secure and quickly accessible haven for their money, the offshore subsidiaries of UK building societies are one obvious answer.

The five largest societies which remain committed to mutuality — Nationwide, Bradford & Bingley, the Britannia, Yorkshire and Portman — all have offshore subsidiaries in the Isle of Man, Guernsey or Alderney, as do some other building societies.

They established offshore operations in order to attract money from expatriates who do not want UK income tax automatically deducted from their interest earnings, and who want to avoid inheritance tax. The majority of offshore operations' customers are expatriates, but some UK residents are also attracted by their interest rates.

Building societies' offshore operations can offer better rates than their onshore parents thanks to their comparatively low operating costs — they don't, for example, have branch offices, and account holders make relatively few transactions.

But the chief attraction of offshore accounts is that they credit interest to accounts without deducting income tax at 20 per cent. For people who do not have to pay UK income tax because they live outside the country, this is obviously desirable. Furthermore the offshore assets of a person whom the Inland Revenue regards as domiciled outside the UK are also normally exempt from inheritance tax.

Building societies' offshore accounts also hold an attraction for taxpaying UK residents: with onshore accounts, the tax is deducted from interest at the same time as it is credited. However, with offshore accounts, interest is credited gross, and tax is only paid once account holders have declared the interest in their tax return.

In the interim, they can earn interest on the interest which they will eventually have to pay in tax. Some societies — including the Yorkshire — also offer a choice of dates on which to receive annual interest, so the account holder can decide in which tax year the interest falls.

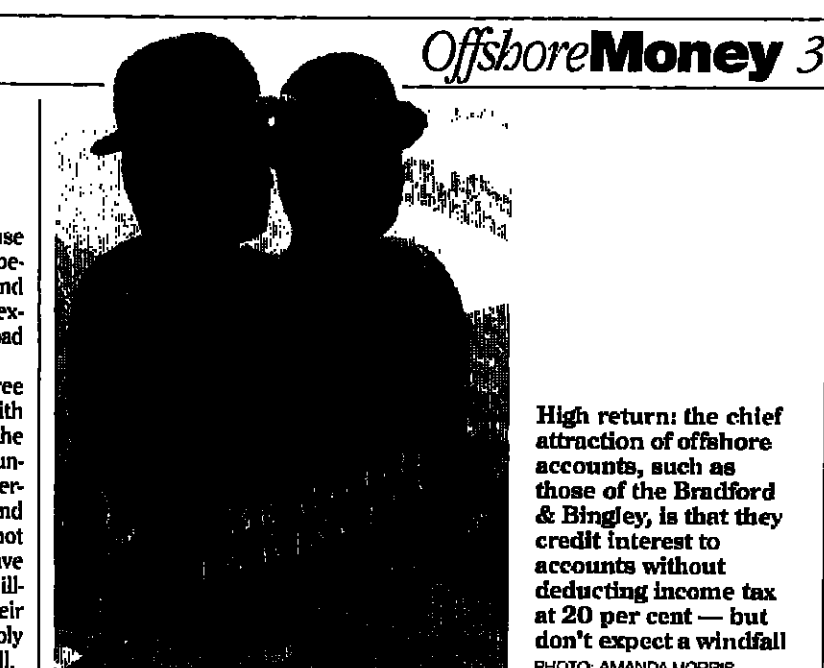
Although money in offshore building society accounts is not covered by the UK Deposit Protection Scheme, which pays a maximum of £18,000 to any one depositor, the Isle of Man has a version of the scheme. This guarantees compensation of up to £15,000 to people with money in institutions which become insolvent. In addition, many UK building societies have said that if their offshore subsidiaries become insolvent, they will meet their liabilities.

One thing depositors should not expect from their offshore account is a windfall. Even if Nationwide, for example, were to succumb to the carpetbaggers and convert to a bank, people who have deposits with its Isle of Man subsidiary would not get free shares or cash. That's because they are not classed as shareholders and members of Nationwide Building Society. The same applies to people who have money with the offshore arms of any other UK building society.

Paul Hutchinson, director and general manager of Bradford & Bingley (Isle of Man) points out that if offshore account holders were classed as Bradford & Bingley shareholders, the Inland Revenue might regard them as having funds within the UK. Those funds would then be liable to income and inheritance tax.

There is still more bad news for expatriates, because even putting their money into an onshore account with a UK building society may not get them a windfall, should the society convert. That is because former societies which have become banks — the Halifax and Northern Rock, for example — exempted some members living abroad from receiving windfall payments.

The Halifax confined its free shares distribution to members with registered addresses in either the UK or one of only 26 other countries, in which it said it had a "material" number of customers, and where the distribution would not break local law. Expatriates have been warned: they would be ill-advised to put — or keep —their money in a building society simply because they hope to net a windfall.



High return: the chief attraction of offshore accounts, such as those of the Bradford & Bingley, is that they credit interest to accounts without deducting income tax at 20 per cent — but don't expect a windfall
PHOTO: AMANDA MORRIS

Insurance

Medical policies that fit the bill

The doctors may get you back on your feet but the cost could give you a relapse, warns **Rachel Baird**

ONE of the most daunting things about going to work abroad is the possibility of falling seriously ill or having an accident. Enlightened employers realise this, and purchase private medical insurance (PMI) on behalf of their expatriate workers. But not all overseas employees are so lucky, and the self-employed must also fend for themselves.

Before buying private insurance, it's worth checking on the state healthcare available in the country you're going to. In Canada, for example, you are entitled after three months to participate in the Canadian version of the National Health Service, for a monthly fee which would be lower than the premiums on a private medical insurance (PMI) policy, says Kimberly le Comte, consultant at healthcare consultants Watson Wyatt.

However, in some countries, you certainly will want to use private medical care, and a PMI policy should help you to cover at least some of the costs involved.

Several insurers — including Guardian Health, Norwich Union, BUPA, PPP, OHRA and International Health Insurance Danmark — sell policies which cover some or all of the individual expat's medical care expenses. In line with PMI policies for people living in the UK, "international" PMI policies are designed to cover treatment for short-term, curable medical conditions, not long-term ones.

What is special about international PMI cover is that it pays for medical treatment while you're working abroad. Some policies cover treatment anywhere in the world, while others restrict you to one region. In addition, many international PMI policies will also, as an optional extra, cover the cost of your evacuation to a country that can offer the care you need.

But beyond this, UK and international PMI policies are fundamentally similar. Premiums on both types of policy are rising faster than general inflation as medical costs soar. According to James Cooper, sales director at insurance intermediary William Russell, international PMI premiums are currently rising by 10 to 15 per cent a year.

What you will pay for international PMI cover will depend on your age, the parts of the world in which you want to be covered, and how comprehensive you wish your policy to be.

Not surprisingly, the cost of PMI rises as you get older to reflect the fact that older people tend to need more medical help. Where you'll be working is also likely to affect your premiums, because most insurers divide the world into sections and set different rates for each, to reflect geographical variations in medical costs.

Norwich Union's Global Care, for example, divides the world into five areas. In terms of a case study, a 30-year-old would pay £360 a year for cover in the cheapest area — the Middle East — and £1,068 for cover in the most expensive — North and

continued on page 5




Investments

Getting the most out of your money

Tony Levene

LONDON-BASED investment data monitor Micropal records more than 5,000 funds and around 600 management companies in its monthly Offshore Funds listing. And that is just the tip of the iceberg. There are tens of thousands of other funds which can be accessed from hundreds more managers, whether based onshore or offshore.

Expatriates typically have more money to invest than their onshore colleagues. But, equally, they have less access to the advice necessary to choose between the bewildering variety of funds. Whether onshore or offshore, investors must check their own circumstances first. Ask yourself if you are saving for a specific objective and over what time-scale, or whether you just want to accumulate as large a fund as possible for the distant future. Coupled with this is the degree of risk you are prepared to accept — whether you would find the ups and downs of stock markets married to currency factors too much of a nightmare.

Moving offshore is also a good time to reconsider an existing investment portfolio. Prune the deadwood — shares and funds which have a poor performance outlook or which no longer fit in with your personal objectives. But keep the fresh shoots, especially if they are invested in shares. It is rarely worth while selling a good investment just because it falls under onshore rules and the costs of switching from one fund to another can be high.

Offshore money usually means tax exemption. And putting your money into offshore funds is no different. But to come up with the tax-free goods, the trust has to have a tax to reclaim. This presents no difficulty for bond or cash funds which can pass on gross dividends or interest earned to investors who are then responsible for their own tax declarations. These funds appeal to those who want to take a low risk with their money although the reverse side of this coin can be pedestrian performance.

Equity funds which invest in shares are different. These are aimed at investors who are prepared to take risks, hoping that they will outpace safer funds over time and

continued on page 5

continued from page 4

South America. With the Norwich Union policy, if you travel outside your own rating area, you are also covered for treatment in lower rated areas, and for emergency treatment and evacuation only in higher rated areas.

Many insurers also offer different levels of cover, so that, for example, you can choose a cheaper policy — such as OHRA's Medios International Section One — which covers you against the cost of hospital treatment, but not against repatriation or the cost of consulting a general practitioner or dentist.

Cheaper policies may also place more restrictions on the amount you can claim for particular treatments, or require you to pay a relatively large excess towards the costs of any treatment. When choosing a policy, says Keith Phillips, director of marketing for health insurance advisers Healthfirst, the crucial thing is to be sure what a policy does and does not cover. As with all insurance, that means reading the small print.

In particular, determine where in the world you will be covered, and against which costs. Treatment for complaints you had before the start of the policy may well not be covered, for example. Other common exclusions include the treatment of HIV-related illnesses and injuries incurred during more risky sports, and the costs of a normal pregnancy.

Look out, too, for limits on the amount of time that a policy covers treatment — PPP's International Health Plan, for example, will not pay for more than 180 days, treatment in any year. Many policies currently available place strict limits on the amount of psychiatric care they cover. There are often monetary limits on what a policy will pay out, either for particular treatments, or overall.

On the positive side, ensure that your policy provider offers a 24-hour help line. Insurers do use these to help control the cost of your treatment, but helplines can also put you in touch with local English-speaking doctors and other medical services.

Telephone contacts: Norwich Union, (+44) 1703 259 631; Guardian Healthcare, (+44) 1303 853 409; BUPA, (+44) 171 656 2000; PPP, (+44) 1323 432002; IHI Danmark, (+44) 1624 677 472; OHRA, (+44) 1703 620 620.



Drama out of a crisis: but the real-life ER treatment may leave you financially as well as emotionally drained PHOTO: CHANNEL 4

Stock answer: hold on to shares that perform PHOTO: GARRY WEASER

continued from page 4

that spreading the holdings widely will reduce the risk of too many bad eggs.

Most equity trusts produce little or no dividends at all after their charges, although the UK stock market is more generous. But whatever the level, offshore funds are normally unable to reclaim the tax paid on share payouts.

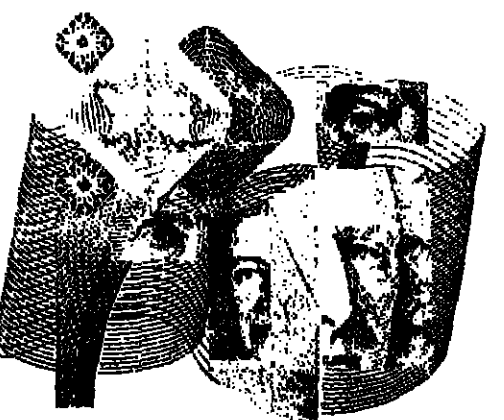
Keeping your investments offshore does help if you want to switch your money from one area to another. Most onshore funds are hit by taxes on capital gains or profits when the holder decides to move focus — from the Far East to the United States, or from shares to bonds — even when fund holders take no cash. Offshore, however, capital gains taxes are a non-starter.

Many fund management groups have set up umbrella funds to take advantage of this. Each features a wide variety of investment objectives with easy switching. Look for a firm with a broad range of strengths because there are charges and a possible tax bill if you move from umbrella to umbrella.

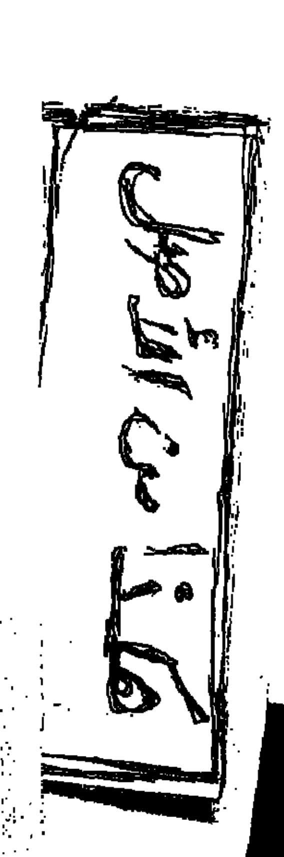
Umbrellas with their sub-funds are ideal for investors whose needs change as they approach their objective. An offshore investor building up a retirement fund, for instance, might be happy to take the high risk/high return route of an emerging market or smaller company shares when they are 20 years away from their goal.

With 10 years to go, they should be thinking about moving into more mainstream shares, and within three or four years of the target date, they should divert into lower risk bonds. Finally, they should ensure all the gains are protected with a switch into an ultra-safe cash fund for the last few months.









Pensions

Well-earned rest

Retirement may seem a long way off but it's never too early to start planning, says **Tony Levene**

PENSIONS come low on most priority lists when people start an exciting — and well paid — job in a new country. But planning for the day when you will be happier sitting watching the world go by instead of helping making the world go round is easier — and more profitable — the earlier it is started.

With expatriates typically retiring earlier than their counterparts at corporate headquarters, a retirement fund could need to supply income for thirty or more years. So you will need to take careful advice.

Sorting out your retirement offshore is a three-tier process combining your pensions past, your present day provision and your future funds. The past or foundation stone for an expatriate pension is the contribution record notched up in the holder's original country.

Someone with a UK background could have a mix of company, personal and state pensions. You cannot lose benefits you have already built up no matter where you move to. And if your stay overseas is limited to a few years, you may be able to hang on to your UK pension, especially if you continue to work for a UK company. This has the advantages of continuity and — assuming you intend retiring in the UK — of your eventual pension being paid in sterling.

The complications of tax relief usually mean you have to have "relevant" earnings in the UK to qualify for a UK pension scheme. But there are special exemptions which can last up to 10 years if you continue working for a UK company.

The difficulty comes when you are assessed for tax in your new country. Some tax authorities add on pension benefits and then tax you on them. The usual solution is to negotiate a salary package to ensure that you are no worse off than if you had stayed in the UK on the same salary and qualified for tax relief on pensions.

Paying into a personal pension plan to cover an absence of a few years is more difficult. But one way around this may be to increase payments for previous years spent in the UK using provisions which allow you to go back as many as six years. Professional advisers can help with the complicated rules and their application in your individual case.

Sitting tight: Holding on to your existing UK policy has the advantages of continuity and your eventual pension being paid in sterling PHOTO: SUEA…

State pension provision in the UK is mean — and getting meaner. But if you have paid some National Insurance payments in the UK, you have a contributions record which will normally allow you to claim a pension when you reach state retirement age.

Working abroad for a period of less than 12 months should not affect your UK contributions record. Social security payments made in EU and some other states can also count thanks to a series of agreements between the UK and certain other nations.

If you are really on your own — self-employed or working in a country with little or no pension provision — your choice is between an offshore retirement plan and simply saving up your money.

According to the Allied Dunbar Expatriate Tax and Investment Handbook — essential reading for serious offshore financial planning, "the scope for good quality offshore individual pension plans is limited. There is a thriving market in offshore insurance companies and some of these are designed to mirror pension plans in the UK. But they should never be confused with the real article."

A number are little more than 10 year savings plans with high costs. They are often structured so plan holders pay substantial penalty costs if they have to stop early or reduce payments.

But looking to your future, an individual pension plan is no more than an investment scheme tailored to your chosen retirement date and locked in until then. It can then be used to buy an annuity to provide regular income for the rest of your life.

You could equally invest in suitable offshore funds. One advantage is you pay what you can when you can, so you are not tied in by the penalty clauses on long term regular savings contracts. The trick is to replicate a pension fund by moving from equities to bonds and then to cash in the final years before retirement to avoid stockmarket turbulence.

The investment plan for those later years should also consider the currency you will need in the country where you intend to spend your retirement. As the last months have shown only too graphically, foreign exchange movements can wipe out — or give a massive boost — to the best laid financial strategy.

And if you are worried about being hard up and raiding your retirement fund too early, you can invest the money through a trust arrangement which keeps your money until until either your retirement age or earlier ill health or death.

Prepare for a soft landing

Simon Read

IF YOU are heading home, how should you face the challenge of switching your financial arrangements back to UK shores? The flight home could bring you a ton of tax problems.

"Expatriates should review all investments three months before returning to the UK," cautions David Kennedy, an independent financial adviser. "All bank and building society accounts should be closed while you are still non-resident. If you wait until after returning to the UK then it is too late; you will be resident and liable for UK tax."

You must work abroad for a complete tax year to qualify as a non-resident, so it may be worth delaying your return until after April 5. If not, you can at least avoid capital gains tax by liquidating your portfolios before you return: failure to do so could land you with a large tax bill.

If you did not achieve non-residency status, you are liable for full capital gains tax but may be able to shelter earnings from income tax under the 100 per cent foreign earnings deduction rules. These allow you to keep your earnings tax-free if you have worked abroad for 365 days and not returned for more than one-sixth of that period.

The Inland Revenue is likely to regard money paid to you to cover such expenses as housing and transport as part of your income, and tax you accordingly. Persuading them otherwise will prove a lengthy — and quite probably fruitless — business.

On the other hand, any local taxes you have paid abroad can be offset against a UK tax bill. But you will need a tax certificate from the overseas tax authority concerned.

And if you plan to move abroad again, you'll need to move fast to preserve your tax-free status. You will have just 90 days to get out of town.

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Bottom line: if your investments have risen sharply, it may be wise to 'bed and breakfast' them — selling on one day, and buying back the next — to minimise capital gains charges

Passing the inspection

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or get the tax relief through MIRAS. The tax relief benefits have shrunk in recent years. They only cover the first £30,000 of your loan, and relief in this tax year comes at 15 per cent.

What's more, it is set to fall to 10 per cent with the new tax year in April. Even if you decide against claiming MIRAS while you are in your expat phase, you can go back to it once this phase is over.

Inevitably, being "non resident and not ordinarily resident" has its disadvantages. You cannot make personal pensions contributions, and as very few companies pay contributions into personal pensions, that can be a potential worry. All is not lost, though. Assuming you have not made the maximum contributions you were allowed in the past — and few people have — you can pay in the contributions you could have made for each of the previous six years.

Anyone in a company pension scheme can continue payments normally. But there can be complications. Under American law, employers' contributions to their pension are taxed as part of salary pay. If you want to qualify as "not resident and not ordinarily resident" you must have a full-time job outside the UK for a full tax year — from April 6, 1997 to April 5, 1998, for instance. That is rule one.

In addition, you must not spend more than 90 days on average in Britain over any four-year period, although stays can vary provided you are not in Britain for more than half of any one tax year. You can do "incidental" parts of your job in Britain such as reporting back to head office. But tax offices are always suspicious where expats are concerned.

The dates are crucial. If you leave Britain on April 1, 1998 you only stay away until April 7, 1999 — just over a year, to qualify as "not resident and not ordinarily resident". But if you depart a week later, you need to be away for two years, effectively.

One potential problem before your return involves capital gains tax. If your investments have risen sharply, it may be wise to "bed and breakfast" them — selling on one day, and buying back the next. This ensures your shares' base price — on which the capital gains tax bill will be based — will be higher. So potential capital gains tax bills will be lower. Being "non resident and not ordinarily resident" provides the best answer. But you may not lose out completely if you do not qualify.

The "365-day test" ensures your overseas earnings are free of UK tax if you are away from Britain for more than 12 months, whenever they stop and start. Otherwise, you count as a normal taxpayer. That means any income you receive from funds from tax havens outside the UK will be taxable in the UK, just as they are for anyone else with funds offshore.

Anyone receiving the benefits of the "365-day test" — and a salary at least tax-free in the UK — cannot return to the UK for more than 62 days a year. "Overall, the tax rules in the country to which you are going should have an impact on your disposition," says Caroline Garnham of City solicitors Simmons & Simmons. "Some countries charge you tax on capital gains — even if gains are made in the UK. The crucial point is to start investigations early. Working out answers in a rush can be disastrous."

Rules for people who plan to leave Britain permanently are even more complex than for anyone going for a stint overseas. Specialist advice usually costs money. But the price of going unprepared is likely to be far more expensive, in terms of time, worry and hard cash.

Specialist advice costs money but the price of going unprepared is likely to be far more expensive

GUARDIAN WEEKLY February 22 1998

Attack? Allies Say Yes, No, and Maybe

COMMENT
Josef Joffe in Munich

AS THE United States is priming those bombs destined for Saddam Hussein's biological and chemical weapons labs, Europe is applauding faintly. Only the British — cheers to the "special relationship" — are ready to fly along.

What a change. During the Gulf War in 1991, if some European allies did not dispatch ground forces as the French and British did, they contributed at least a frigate or two. The Germans and the Japanese, citing their unsavory pasts, preferred to buy their way out — with billions of dollars for the American war kitty. The Soviets made a significant contribution just by doing nothing (apart from frantic mediation), rather than siding with their old ally Iraq.

This time, Europe has split along classic lines — never mind its mad dash toward monetary integration and all those sonorous commitments to the "common" foreign and security policy enshrined in the fabled 1991 Maastricht Treaty.

At one extreme are Tony Blair and the British, as enthusiastic about streaking across the Iraqi skies today as Margaret Thatcher was in 1990 when she exhorted President Bush: "Don't go wobbly on me now."

At the other extreme are the French, who in balmier days dispatched General Lafayette to help America against a British tyrant named George. But, then as now, France's motives were not entirely selfless. In the 18th century, the French still held onto some significant real estate in North America, and anything that would weaken their rival Britain also made sense. It was good realpolitik.

This time, the French are against American strikes in Iraq. Their line is: Give diplomacy a chance, and haven't the Iraqi people suffered enough from the seven-year sanctions *les Anglo-Saxons* insist the country must endure?

It isn't all sweet reason that animates the French. In 1991, they went along grudgingly. Only after Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had bitten every French and Soviet hand that wanted to help him did Paris pitch in with the American-led coalition, calculating that it was better to be on the winning side. Now they have concluded that they can afford to sit this one out.

The Germans, as usual, are in between. Even if they wanted to go along, they don't have the right equipment. Though the Luftwaffe flies Tornado bombers like those of Britain's Royal Air Force, these are not ready yet for delivering earth penetrators or tank-breaking submunitions.

But last week, addressing U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen and a bevy of insistent American senators in Munich, Chancellor Helmut Kohl said the magic words: "Of course, America can count on our full political support." And, of course, U.S. Air Force units stationed in Germany could be used for the air strikes against Iraq. So the response of Europe's Big Three to America's proposed use of military force is: "Yes" (Britain), "No" (France) and "Go to it, we'll be cheering from the sidelines" (Germany).

The US is acting like Gary Cooper in High Noon . . . resigned to shoot it out by himself

Why the split? One reason is "Made in the USA." The French have seen the signals coming out of Washington, as have many other Europeans. It isn't just that Bill Clinton has been weakened by Zippergate; many can read the subtext of wobbliness that accompanies the steely rhetoric of the "last remaining superpower." There is a feeling that Clinton would rather not bomb, that he would be happy to see Saddam Hussein step back from the brink.

This hesitancy — and Washington's reluctance to call in its chits — is what allows distinctive national interests to come to the fore. Take the French, and assume that those F-117s and Tomahawk cruise missiles do go into action — "bunker busters," self-guiding submunitions and all.

The French evidently surmise that there will be an uproar in the streets of Araby, complete with lots of burning Uncle Sam effigies. And that CNN will diligently broadcast the images of dead children and destroyed shelters all around the world, 24 hours a day. And if you think in realpolitik terms, as the heirs of Cardinal Richelieu proudly proclaim they do, there are some nifty French gains to be culled from the aftermath.

First, by standing up to American "imperialism," France, would-be conqueror of Egypt in the 1956 Suez War, would bask in the accolades of the Arab world. Not bad, when you consider that France has always tried to regain a foothold in the Levant — where the United States has called the shots for three decades.

Second, French neutrality with an anti-American edge would pile up a good number of IOUs in Baghdad, and these will come in handy when the sanctions are either lifted or broken for good. Look for French oil companies like Elf to get the first concessions. Indeed, France's efforts over the years to get the embargo loosened may be directly tied to its quest for a strategic position in the Persian Gulf's oil fields.

Much the same goes for the Russians, whose president, Boris Yeltsin, in a bizarre outburst, has invoked the specter of "World War III" if the United States hits Iraq. In part, this reflects sheer frustration about the ex-empire's impotence. But there is a dollop of good old realpolitik here, too. The Russians would dearly like to see an end to Saddam-bashing and the sanctions because they might then be able to collect the billions that Iraq owes them for arms deliveries in the 1980s.

How about the Germans, neatly suspended between France and Britain? There is continuity here, too — even after reunification and the end of the Cold War. As in the old days, Germany will not refuse a call from Washington when the chips are down, regardless of Franco-German friendship and European integration. Nor, presumably, will Italy.

In Germany's case, there may also be a guilty conscience at work, as German firms have always been fingered as key suppliers for Iraq's chemical and biological weapons program. Just this past week, in an interview with the weekly German news magazine Spiegel, the former head of Iraqi military intelligence, Wafik Samarai, claimed that his embassy in Bonn was the European purchasing hub for "materials and know-how." Did the German authorities know? "They closed both eyes," alleges the defector.

In the end, nobody except perhaps the French will dare cross the United States. But this time, alliance loyalty costs less than in 1991 when the United States insisted that allies either dispatch their tanks and planes or pay tribute. This time, the United States is acting more like Gary Cooper's sheriff in High Noon, strangely diffident and resigned to shooting it out by himself. As a high-ranking American official put it recently: "If you don't join us, at least don't undermine us — and get out of the way." Most European allies will simply get out of the way and wish the United States Godspeed. Which isn't necessarily bad.

Napoleon once said: "Let me have to fight against coalitions," meaning that the strong do better on their own. Demanding consensus, coalitions are cumbersome — tending toward the lowest common denominator, as was the case in 1991 when the Arabs — and in particular the Saudis — stopped Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf from going all the way to Baghdad. So Napoleon had a point. If the United States and Britain achieve their goals, if they hit what needs to be destroyed, if Saddam Hussein tucks tail and lets the U.N. inspectors come back, then all's well that ends well.

The French will have miscalculated, and blustery Boris Yeltsin will have been sobered up (metaphorically, at least). The Arabs in the street will burn American flags, but their masters will be quietly assessing how long Saddam Hussein will need to rebuild his military capability. And the rest of the world, seeing how America had done its dirty work, will count its blessings. Nobody is looking forward to anthrax "Made in Iraq."

If.

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Hispanic Teenage Pregnancies Rise

Barbara Vobejda and Pamela Constable

THE percentage of Hispanic teenagers who give birth in the United States has surpassed that of African American teenagers for the first time, with both groups more than twice as likely as whites to become mothers before they turn 20, the federal government reported last week.

In 1995, nearly 11 percent of Hispanic teenagers gave birth, compared with about 10 percent of black teenagers and 4 percent of non-Hispanic white teenagers. While the rates for black and white teenagers have declined in recent years, the figures for Hispanics have continued to rise, driven by a 32 percent increase among Mexican Americans since 1989.

The figures represent an important benchmark in teenage birthrates and provide more evidence that Hispanics, the nation's fastest-growing minority group, increasingly are suffering from the problems that historically have plagued African Americans. In 1995, for example, the poverty rate among Hispanics was greater than the figure for blacks for the first time. Hispanics also have higher out-of-wedlock birthrates than African Americans and have the lowest rates of high school and college graduation.

The new study, issued by the National Center for Health Statistics, also underscored what many find a troubling phenomenon in the immigrant community: Hispanics born in the United States were more likely than Hispanics who moved from their homeland to give birth as teenagers, to have babies outside of marriage and to have babies with low birth weights.

Counselors who work with pregnant and sexually active Hispanic girls said many become pregnant for the same reasons as white or African American girls: lack of information, desire for love and embarrassment about using birth control.

But they also cited a number of additional factors, including a reluctance to obtain abortions for religious reasons. Most Hispanics are Roman Catholic, and their daughters grow up with a strong taboo against abortion, even if they are sexually active.

"Once a Latino girl gets pregnant, I would say 98 percent do not see abortion as an option," said Elida Vargas, who directs the adolescent program at Mary's Center, a non-profit clinic in Washington, D.C.

While their birthrates are now highest, more Hispanic teenage mothers are married than are black teenage mothers. But in both groups, the vast majority are unmarried — 67 percent among Hispanic teenagers and 95 percent among black teenagers.

T.J. Mathews, a demographer at the statistics center and lead researcher on the study, argued that although Hispanics often are treated as a group, dramatic statistical differences between Mexican Americans and other subgroups are important.

For example, just 8 percent of births to Cuban Americans in 1995 were to teenagers, while the figure was 24 percent for Puerto Ricans, 20 percent for Mexican Americans and 11 percent for Central and South Americans. For African Americans, the figure was 23 percent and for whites, 10 percent.

Fine Instinct For Survival

EDITORIAL

NO ONE could begrudge Eduard Shevardnadze, 70, a peaceful retirement. As foreign minister in the dying years of the Soviet Union, he helped end the Cold War and allow the nations of Central and Eastern Europe regain their freedom with a minimum of bloodshed. Certainly, like his old boss Mikhail Gorbachev, Mr. Shevardnadze could now be writing books, spending time with family, delivering lectures and even appearing in Pizza Hut commercials. But Mr. Shevardnadze has chosen a different path — one that twice has nearly cost him his life.

The former Soviet diplomat returned to his Caucasus homeland of Georgia in 1992. That onetime Soviet republic had become, in 1991, an independent nation on the Black Sea with a population of about 5.5 million, but independence had brought no happiness. Mr. Shevardnadze proceeded, painfully and against great opposition, to bring order. He disarmed the militias, the thugs and the mafia who had taken over the country. He oversaw the introduction of a democratic constitution and, in the fall of 1995, won an honest election for president with 75 percent of the vote. He instituted economic reforms that reversed Georgia's descent into total poverty.

Along the way, both as foreign minister and now as president, Mr. Shevardnadze accumulated more than his share of enemies. In August 1995 he somehow survived an assassination attempt when a bomb blew up beneath his car. Last week, riding in an armored Mercedes-Benz limousine that the German government donated after that last attack, the Georgian president was targeted again. Assailants fired on his motorcade with automatic weapons and antitank grenade launchers. Two of his bodyguards died, and four others were wounded, but Mr. Shevardnadze escaped unhurt.

Georgia is in a part of the world where instability and ethnic conflict remain the norm. It is also a region that attracts great interest because of its large oil and gas deposits. Georgia itself is not blessed with substantial underground wealth, but it is a player in a huge struggle over the route that new pipelines will take to bring Caspian Sea oil to market. Mr. Shevardnadze suggested that pipeline politics may have played a role in this latest assassination attempt.

It is too soon to form final judgments on such speculation; other theories, including the involvement of radical and disgruntled Chechen rebels, have been put forward. It is not too soon, however, to take note of Mr. Shevardnadze's courage. "I will serve my country however I can until the end," he said after the latest attack. We hope that will mean the end of his term, to be followed by a peaceful retirement.

Racism Comes Full Circle

Richard Cohen reflects on a defamation trial with a strong racial twist

IN MULTIPLE days of testifying at the defamation trial arising out of the Tawana Brawley case, the Rev. Al Sharpton has likened himself to Martin Luther King, compared himself to Adam Clayton Powell and suggested that his persecution of an innocent man for a crime no one committed anyway is yet another battle in the on-going civil rights revolution. Sharpton has lost a lot of weight since he first came to prominence but not, it seems, his ability to take any issue and plunk it straight into the gutter.

As history, his testimony is blasphemy. As theater, it's farce. As a courtroom tactic, however, it might work, since — as we have learned — something unaccountable happens to ordinary people when they become jurors. Whatever the outcome in the slander suit against Sharpton and others, though, the good reverend has provided us all with a lesson in racism. Sharpton is both victim and perpetrator.

Sharpton's tasteless identity crisis — "I think Martin Luther King faced a defamation suit" — comes in a defamation suit of his own. He is one of the targets in an action brought by Steven Pagones, one of the men Sharpton named in the 1987 alleged rape and abduction of Tawana Brawley, then 15 years old and precociously gifted as a story teller.

Brawley's tale was both vivid and horrifying but it lacked, it turned out, a shred of truth. A grand jury concluded she had made the whole thing up. It seems she had been away from home and feared a beating.

Since those days, Brawley has receded into obscurity but Sharpton, has inched his way toward political respectability. He ran in the New York City Democratic mayoralty primary, nearly beating the winner — and general election loser — Ruth Messinger. He may now run for Congress, where a loose tongue and a disregard for the facts seem, along with U.S. citizenship, a requirement of office. Sharpton himself said on the witness stand that Pagones' suit has confirmed his "growing status."

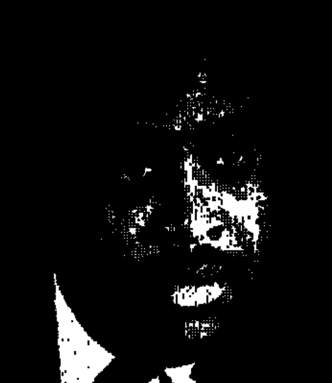
If he is referring to demagoguery then he is, manifestly, right. After all, this suit and the original Brawley case are rooted in an ugly racism for which Sharpton is an unapologetic practitioner. Maybe, there was a time when he truly believed that a group of white men, some of them law enforcement officers, had abducted a black girl and raped her since, in the past, that sort of thing had happened. For much of American history the black experience has been of powerlessness — a history Sharpton knows well.

But by 1987 this experience had been turned on its head. Even Brawley, a mere teenager, knew that she could exonerate herself with an appeal to racism. In fact, she did what countless white women had done in Jim Crow days — blame some unfortunate man of the other race for the sexual sins of someone else. In the bogus cause of "white womanhood," the Ku Klux Klan lynched many a black man.

Brawley — with the help of Sharpton — attempted something similar. It did not seem to matter to either of them that Pagones was innocent. It mattered only that he was white — and, at the time, a county prosecutor. What Sharpton did not count on was that this man would, steadfastly, assert his innocence and ask for his own day in court. Steven Pagones has both patience and guts. And Sharpton not a shred of common decency.

His lies about the man, his inane refusal even to concede that Brawley concocted her story, makes his self-comparison to Martin Luther King pretty close to revolting. King had enormous physical and intellectual courage, but Sharpton cannot even bring himself to utter an apology. King made history. Sharpton tries only for the nightly news.

What's worse, no apology is demanded of him. In New York City,



Al Sharpton: unapologetic

he is treated as a standing member of the political establishment. The former mayor, David Dinkins, was one of those who urged Sharpton to run for Congress. Jesse Jackson is Sharpton's friend and defender. No one, it seems, is willing to hold him accountable for the unconscionable defamation of a man on little more than his race. On the contrary, to many people that makes him a hero.

The Tawana Brawley case is the personification of American racism come full circle. She cried "white" where her predecessors had cried "black", and Al Sharpton, having heard the cry, organized a modern-day lynching. He ought to be anathema for what he did. Instead he'll just liken himself to some other hero — and keep on talking until, maybe by accident, he tells the truth.

Militias Take Revenge on Ousted Junta

James Rupert In Freetown

SIERRA LEONEAN militias backing the civilian president took over two provincial capitals last Sunday and, with local residents, began lynching people who had backed the military government ousted last week. The forces of the ousted junta appeared to be collapsing and fleeing into rural areas.

Thousands of Nigerian troops, who forced the junta from power last week after a nine-day battle for Freetown, consolidated their hold on the capital. They restored the government radio station and broadcast warnings that looters — who have struck stores and warehouses in recent days — would be shot on sight.

Many residents remained hungry, and at the main hospital wounded people lay on beds and floors, many left unaided because of a lack of even basic medical supplies. Aid organizations struggled to arrange food and medical shipments to the city, which remains virtually cut off from the outside world.

The Sierra Leonean army allied with a rural rebel group to oust the elected president, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, in a coup last May. But Nigerian troops; who had been providing security assistance to Kabbah — plus international sanctions and popular opposition — prevented the military regime from gaining full control of the country or the economy.

The junta agreed in October to return power to Kabbah by April 22, but delayed implementing the deal. Nigerian troops, now under the formal auspices of the Nigerian-commanded West African peacekeeping force, known by the acronym ECOMOG, launched their offensive February 5.



Sierra Leoneans fleeing the fighting in Freetown arrive in the Guinean capital Conakry last week

The junta leader, Lt. Col. Johnny Paul Koromah, fled Freetown on Saturday last week and, speaking to BBC radio by telephone from just outside the capital, vowed to fight on. Last Sunday, the Nigerians reported he was believed heading toward the Liberian border.

Reached by telephone and radio, residents and local journalists in Sierra Leone's second-largest town, Bo, said soldiers of the ousted junta had broken into shops and homes and looted them before fleeing. They said as many as 10,000 tribal militiamen — traditional village hunters called *kamajors* — walked into Bo on Monday.

The militia's arrival prompted a day of jubilant celebration and bloody vengeance, residents said. A Sierra Leonean journalist in Bo told BBC radio that kamajors captured eight junta soldiers and handed them over to crowds of young men from the town who burned the soldiers to death in the streets.

"There is mob justice going on," said Johannes George, a priest in the Eastern Province capital, Kenema. In that town, too, "eight of the [junta's soldiers] have been burned alive. . . . The kamajors are not trying to control the population," he said. "We are waiting for ECOMOG to come in and bring some sanity to the town."

Nigerian officers here said a column of their troops that entered Sierra Leone from Liberia last week was imminently expected in Kenema, and a column from Freetown was moving toward Bo.

The Nigerians struggled to prevent vigilante justice and looting in Freetown, as well. Over the weekend, the city's streets have been thick with residents trudging along the curbsides, returning to their homes, searching for food, or simply watching the Nigerians.

Young men have set up roadblocks, halting the few cars about, and demanded to search for arms or junta supporters. Curbside arguments have drawn crowds, and anyone denounced as a supporter of the junta has been likely to be beaten.

Nigerian soldiers have intervened in many such scenes. The Nigerian commander in Sierra Leone, Col. Maxwell Khobe, spoke on the restored state radio station on Monday, calling for an end to such attacks and to looting.

"Looting has become the order of the day," he said. "This must stop. If we loot, we are in the same category" as the ousted junta.

The number of casualties in the battle for Freetown remains unknown, but the city's main medical center, Government Connaught Hospital, was overwhelmed with the dead and wounded. The Associated Press reported on Saturday last week that at least 118 people had been killed.

In Death, a Hero Shames His Country

Lee Hockstader In Tel Aviv

ISRAEL always mourns its f[…] warriors with a special inten[…] But it wasn't the death of yo[…] Sergeant Nikolai Rappaport t[…] has shocked and shamed Isr[…] since he was killed in Lebanon e[…]lier this month. It is what t[…] learned about his life.

Before he joined the army l[…] year, Rappaport, a quiet, friendly[…] year-old Russian immigrant who [ar]rived in Israel three years ago, l[…] with his father in a one-room [s…] adjoining an auto parts depot n[…] the city's old bus station. There [was] no telephone, no proper win[…] and only a makeshift bed built [of] planks. A ramshackle court[yard] patchily covered with corrug[ated] tin, is strewn with refuse and str[…] with neighbors' laundry.

After Rappaport was killed i[n a] Hezbollah guerrilla ambush, the [di]lapidated shack in one of Tel Av[iv's] oldest and shabbiest neigh[bor]hoods was splashed over [the] evening news and into prosp[erous] Israelis' living rooms.

"We stand here embarrassed: we didn't see, didn't hear, didn't [..] and didn't know how difficult i[t was] for your family," Tova Nayberg, [Rap]paport's Hebrew teacher, said [at a] memorial service for him last w[eek]. Outside Rappaport's Givati Bri[gade], she was one of the few Israelis [who] attended the service.

"Among those who paid tribu[te to] Nikolai Rappaport, nobody [..] knew the truth about his life," [..] the newspaper Maariv. "Beca[use] here one can die like a hero and [live] like a dog."

President Ezer Weizman, [..] appeared genuinely stunned w[hen] he visited the home to pay [his] respects to Rappaport's father [and] sister, said: "It is a pity we [have] come to this point, where a f[…] of a fighter in the Israel De[fense] Forces is living in such disgra[ceful] conditions."

Russian, Ukrainian and Ce[ntral] Asian immigrants in Rappap[ort's] Shapira neighborhood in sout[h] Tel Aviv said if Israelis really [had] wanted to know about immigr[ant] problems, they could have know[n].

"As long as nothing happens, p[eo]ple pay absolutely no attentio[n to] us," said Nikolai Sheleatov, a [Rus]sian construction worker in his [..] twenties who hasn't worked a [day] since he arrived four months [ago]. "There's just a huge wall betw[een] immigrants and Israelis."

Nearly 800,000 immigrants f[rom] the former Soviet Union — ab[out a] seventh of Israel's population — [have] flooded the country since [..]. While a good many of them [are] elderly and live poorly, they al[..] out of sight of the majority [of] Israelis.

After the memorial servi[ce in] Israel, Rappaport's body, i[n a] wooden casket covered with [an] Israeli flag, was flown to Kras[nodar] for burial. Although he had [..] Israeli citizenship, Rappaport c[ould] not be buried in a Jewish ceme[tery] in Israel because his mother is [not] Jewish, so by religious law he i[s not] considered Jewish. On Wedne[sday] last week he was laid to re[st in] Russia.

His father, who is Jewish, acc[om]panied the body to Krasnod[ar and] said he did not know if he w[ould] return to Israel.

Clinton Continues to Defy Gravity

John F. Harris

PRESIDENT Clinton, one of his advisers said last week, is a little like the coyote in the old "Roadrunner" cartoons. He has raced off the cliff — but managed for a moment to keep running on air.

The point, as this aide explained it, is that the coyote did plummet eventually. And many other Clinton advisers, both inside and outside the White House, acknowledge they have the same fear.

Among the Clinton inner circle there is widespread satisfaction — and no small amount of surprise — at how well the short-term strategy crafted by Clinton's lawyers and political team in the first days of the Monica Lewinsky controversy has succeeded. By turning away questions, having his wife Hillary Rodham Clinton and lieutenants attack Whitewater independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr, and continuing his schedule as though all was normal, Clinton is prospering politically during the gravest legal threat he has faced during his presidency.

But many Clinton advisers acknowledge that their success in plowing through the frenzied first days of the controversy does not mean they have a long-term strategy. Instead, these people say, White House damage control remains an improvisational, day-to-day affair.

Many advisers, who said they would share their views candidly only on a not-for-attribution basis, expect the next critical moment to come when Starr seeks to hear from Clinton directly about allegations that he carried on a sexual relationship with the former White House intern and then urged her to lie about it.

So far, Starr has not asked Clinton to give a deposition or appear before the grand jury that has been hearing testimony on the allegations. But several Clinton advisers inside and outside the White House say they fully expect such a request — possibly as early as this month — and that it will force Clinton to deal with the controversy in ways he has so far avoided.

As a practical matter, several advisers said last week, there is little chance Clinton could refuse to appear without antagonizing a public that, according to most polls, has overwhelmingly given Clinton the

..AND SO THE PRESIDENCY VANISHED QUITE QUICKLY. BEGINNING WITH ITS FEET AND ENDING WITH ITS MOUTH, WHICH KEPT SAYING, "I DID NOT HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH THAT WOMAN."

BILLY AND THE DIMINISHING PRESIDENCY

A REAL PRESIDENT WOULDN'T SAY THAT!

HE MUST BE AN IMPOSTER

benefit of the doubt. But once Clinton gives a story to Starr and a grand jury, there will be overwhelming pressure for him to start giving some answers to the public, some advisers say.

So far, he has snubbed such detailed questions as whether and how often he met and called Lewinsky, gave her gifts, or discussed the affidavit she gave in the Paula Jones sexual harassment suit.

"This is driven by public opinion, and if that changes, the strategy will change," said one Democrat who speaks regularly with Clinton aides.

Public opinion has already figured critically in Clinton's response. Prior to last week's barrage by Clinton lawyers and various aides about alleged leaks by Starr, White House aides were already in possession of data by presidential pollster Mark Penn showing overwhelming public sentiment for prosecuting Starr if it is shown that he violated confidentiality rules, according to Democratic sources.

In a news conference this month, Clinton cited confidentiality rules in explaining why he couldn't answer questions about his relationship with Lewinsky. Last week, White House spokesman Joe Lockhart acknowledged that, while there is a gag order in the Paula Jones case, there is no legal bar to Clinton telling his story about Lewinsky.

Already, among some White House staff members and outside Democrats who consult with the White House, several of whom have spoken directly with Clinton, there is open speculation about what one called an "alternate story line." This is a way that Clinton, when the time comes, can offer a benign explanation for the close relationship he apparently enjoyed with Lewinsky.

Under one scenario being floated by various Democrats close to the White House, Clinton could try to explain the high-level attention that Lewinsky got from Clinton and his close friend, Vernon E. Jordan Jr., by noting that Lewinsky was close to prominent fund-raiser Walter Kaye, and therefore merited special care.

Under another scenario, which some Democrats said they have urged the president and his advisers to articulate, Clinton would stick by his story that there was no sexual involvement with Lewinsky but acknowledge that he was wrong to get so close to her without understanding that their relationship would be subject to question by outsiders.

One Democrat who consults with the White House on political matters said it is "perfectly plausible" that Clinton might have heard that Lewinsky was spreading fantasized stories about their relationship. Knowing that his reputation would make many people inclined to believe her, this person asserted, Clinton may have taken pains to meet with her last December and instructed Jordan to help her find work.

SO FAR, none of these exculpatory story lines has been offered on anything like an official basis by the White House. But several advisers say that this is a matter of time, despite the preference of Clinton lawyers that he stay silent as long as possible.

"Look, at some point he's going to have to tell his story and explain himself," said one Democrat who consults frequently with the White House.

The danger, several advisers said, is that new facts will emerge that Clinton could not explain innocently, and would lead people who have reserved judgment so far to conclude that he lied in his public denials or under oath. While some advisers think the public is willing to accept a measure of dishonesty on sexual matters, others said they fear that conclusive proof of lying still has the potential to destroy his standing. Speaking with students at Harvard University last week, White House spokesman Michael McCurry acknowledged as much. "If it turns out what the president has said has not been fair and square with the American people, that has enormous implications."

But McCurry went on to say that the stakes were equally high for those who've reported on the allegations: "If it turns out that much of what has been reported in this environment ends up being not true, the damage that's been done to the institution of the press itself . . . will be grievous."

Still, White House aides express surprise at the public's forbearance so far. One aide said that when the controversy first broke he predicted that as long as Clinton's job approval rating did not drop much below 50 percent there would be no need for him to make any fundamental change in strategy. Some recent polls have placed Clinton nearly 30 percentage points higher than that, leaving him free to assume an above-it-all pose.

Last week offered a typical example. On Wednesday morning Clinton appeared in the Rose Garden to deliver favorable news from an economic report and reiterate his warnings that a military conflict with Iraq is imminent unless Baghdad gives free access to U.N. weapons inspectors. But at the end of the remarks — when he usually would stay to answer a few questions from reporters — Clinton quickly pivoted and walked away.

Plainly, the crisis atmosphere that dominated the White House when the Lewinsky story erupted has eased greatly. News briefings, which four weeks ago were jam-packed and carried live by the networks, have thinned out, and the daily round of questions and non-answers has become a predictable routine.

But even as Clinton's team breathes somewhat easier, some aides confessed they remain watchful. Only Clinton and a small group of lawyers — including White House counsel Charles F.C. Ruff, and private attorneys David Kendall and Mickey Kantor — are able to ask questions and learn new facts about Clinton's relationship with Lewinsky.

Those helping Clinton respond politically acknowledge that they are at the mercy of new facts that emerge daily. "I don't think there's some kind of long-term road map," said one Clinton political aide.

Asian Meltdown Hits Indonesian Hospitals

Keith B. Richburg In Jakarta

AT THE Cipto Mangunkusumo Central Hospital here, doctors found that they no longer could afford the specially treated plastic bags which hold blood for transfusions. So the hospital director asked staffers to scour the local markets in search of old-fashioned milk bottles that could be washed out and used instead.

In the hospital's operating rooms too, frugality is the watchword; expensive imported thread is out, catgut is in. And surgeons are being told to make more economical use of the thread when stitching up a patient. "We have to use less expensive materials and supplies," said Hermansyur Kartowisastro, the hospital's deputy director for medical care. "We are also asking the surgeons not to use so much."

In the kidney dialysis ward, $10 artificial kidney tubes no longer are thrown away after each treatment but are rinsed and reused as many as eight times for the same patient.

Indonesia is struggling to reverse a debilitating economic meltdown in which its currency lost at least 70 percent of its foreign-exchange value since last summer and the price of imported goods — including medical supplies, equipment and drugs — soared beyond reach.

State-run hospitals such as this sprawling facility — one of the largest in the city — are searching for ways to tighten their belts and adjust to the new reality. "With some creativity, we can overcome the problem," Ahmad Djojosugito, the hospital director, commented. "We have to innovate."

Younger doctors — trained in the recent years of Indonesian affluence — became accustomed to ordering a battery of tests and X-rays before making a diagnosis. Now they are instructed to be very selective in the tests they order and to take only essential X-rays.

Ahmad was trained as a physician during Indonesia's leaner times, when supplies were short and hospitals made do on bare-bones budgets. "We have to return to the difficulties we had in the 1960s and '70s," he said. For intravenous feeding and blood transfusions, he said, "I remember using the old bottle with the tubing. I had to rinse it out and reuse it. Now we have to go back to that again."

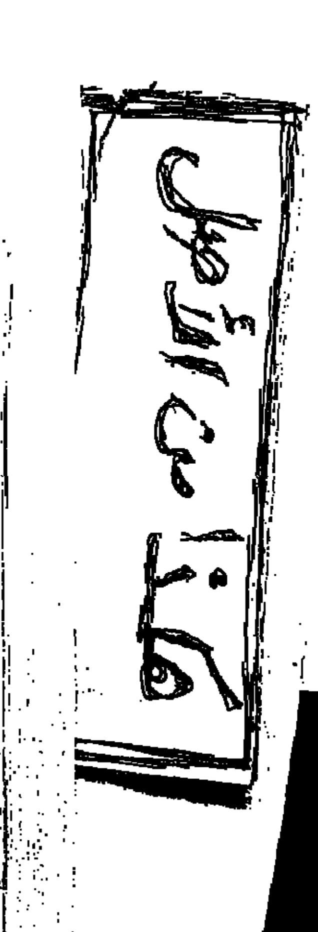
Local newspaper reports said four people had died on the island of Bali in January because they could not continue expensive kidney dialysis treatments.

Pudji Rahardjo, a physician who runs the Cipto Mangunkusumo hospital's dialysis ward, said the cost of one five-hour treatment has shot up from 150,000 rupiah ($15) to about 500,000 rupiah ($51) — all because of the plunge in the local currency in relation to the U.S. dollar. He said regular patients complained vigorously about the cost but that most have no alternative because they depend on the weekly treatment to survive. "Maybe you can encourage your people to help us," the doctor said to an American reporter.

The biggest problem, health workers say, is the high cost of medicine — chiefly imported drugs, but also locally manufactured medicines made with some imported raw materials. At the Medica pharmacy in Jakarta, Ane, the assistant manager, said she has seen the prices for most drugs double since the economic crisis began.

At the nearby Aries pharmacy, Naomi, the assistant manager, said the price of one common antibiotic, amoxycillin, has jumped from 400 rupiah per tablet to 1,000 rupiah.

World Bank President James Wolfensohn announced during a visit here this month that the bank would provide extra funding to help Indonesia purchase drugs and basic medical supplies for its public hospitals. Wolfensohn said Indonesia's more than 200 pharmaceutical companies rely on imports for 90 percent of their materials, and he called the problem critical.



Boyhood on the Boardwalk

Jonathan Yardley

NOW AND THEN
From Coney Island to Here
By Joseph Heller
Knopf. 259 pp. $24

PEOPLE curious about the connections between Catch-22 and the life of its author will find a few tantalizing tidbits in Now And Then, Joseph Heller's memoir, but mainly this is a book about his boyhood in Coney Island. As such it is lovely, the best writing Heller has done since the novel that made him famous, a richly evocative account of a vanished place and way of life. Now And Then is funny, albeit in a subdued rather than uproarious way, and it is touching without ever being maudlin.

Unlike so many of today's callow and self-infatuated memoirists Heller has lived a real life, full of incident and occasion, and has a real story to tell. In Catch-22, this book makes clear, he told one important part of his story — certainly the most dramatic part — disguised as fiction, in his bitterly sardonic narrative about how Air Force bombardiers coped with the terror and lunacy of warfare. As he indicates here, there have been other, more private dramas, including a well-documented siege of Guillain-Barre syndrome and a long marriage that contained much happiness but ended in prolonged rancor.

But it is clear now that the most important story Heller has to tell about himself is that of his boyhood in Coney Island during the 1920s and 1930s.

Heller, who is now in his early seventies, lived with his widowed mother and his brother and sister — many years later he learned that they were actually his half-siblings from a previous marriage of their father's — in a four-room apartment in Coney Island, a "safe, insular and secure" neighborhood in the famous old Brooklyn resort, a place where "I never heard of a rape, an assault or an armed robbery."

The residents were Italians or, in Heller's little corner of the world, Jews. They had little money, but they came into the world with the expectation life would be hard, and they taught themselves to enjoy such pleasures and satisfactions as it offered them: "Looking back, I find it something of a miracle that from such a beginning the four of us in my family separately and independently eventually found ourselves with enough money to satisfy our needs and our material wants. Our expectations, while varying considerably, were disciplined. We did not want what we could not hope to have, and we were not made bitter or envious by knowing of people who had much more. The occasional neighborhood communist proselytizer got nowhere with us. Neither, I must record, did the dedicated anti-communist ideologue, not then or later. We worked at what we could because we never doubted we had to work, and we felt fortunate indeed that we could find work."

They also found plenty of play. Coney Island had passed its heyday by the 1920s — though it was bright and glorious by contrast with the sad, dilapidated condition it now endures — but the two famous old amusement parks, Luna and Steeplechase, were still in business, and the beach was eternally inviting. It was simultaneously a resort and a neighborhood. "Even at this late date," Heller writes, "people I meet with a large stock of memories of visits to Coney Island still express surprise upon hearing that I grew up there, that families lived there, and still do, and that children were brought up there, and still are."

Indeed it is hard, at least if one is of a certain age, not to think of a childhood at Coney Island as something unique, precious and wonderful. Heller does little to disabuse us of that notion. The picture he paints is of a close, happy, almost Edenic — if one can imagine that word applied to any aspect of New York City — community, a way station between ethnic distinctiveness and assimilation into the American mainstream, where children inherited and respected the traditions their parents brought to this country even as they learned to be Americans themselves. But there were many other such communities, in New York and elsewhere. What made this one so uncommon was that it existed smack in the middle of a place that to most other New Yorkers — except those sufficiently privileged to inhabit the shores of Long Island or the Hudson River — seemed a fairyland.

Heller tells many funny, vivid stories about the pranks he and his friends played, the explorations they undertook in the amusement parks, the adventures they had beside and in the water. In one passage he manages to convey all of this to the reader while at the same time leaving no doubt as to the lasting effect of those years on his own life. The passage is about a competition among the boys to swim to a buoy about a quarter-mile offshore, and ends as follows: "All of us in our innocence and ignorance spoke freely of that bell buoy as a 'bell-boy.' Not until after I had my degree in English from New York University and a masters degree from Columbia and after a year more in English at Oxford on a Fulbright scholarship and two years teaching English at Pennsylvania State University, then a college, were my eyes opened upon meeting my friend Marvin Green, who then was selling art work for slide shows at a time when I was commissioning some as a writer in the promotion department of Time magazine and who had loved sailing since a child. The letters 'buoy' were not pronounced 'boy' as in buoyant but more properly 'boo-ey,' as in no other English word I know of. I laughed scornfully the first time I heard him say it and thought he was crazy. Of course I rushed to a dictionary to check. It still sounds better my way."

You can take the boy out of Coney Island but you can't take Coney Island out of the boy. Many other places and experiences were central to Heller's life, and he writes about them to varying degrees in this book: the war, his education, the G.I. Bill, his marriage, his various jobs — in particular the one at Time out of which emerged his second novel, Something Happened — and his literary apprenticeship. But Coney Island was the core, the absolute center. Going back there with him is a joy.

When Mediocrity Rises

John Dorfman

STAR-SPANGLED MEN
America's Ten Worst Presidents
By Nathan Miller
Scribner. 272pp. $23

EVERYONE professes to want the best, and yet the worst has its own undeniable appeal. It satisfies our voyeuristic desires, our craving to know just how bad a thing can get. The worst gives us a feeling of superiority, even a kind of moral thrill. For an American historian, studying the worst presidents must be a joy akin to rubbernecking for the layman. Nathan Miller, a popular historian who has written biographies of both Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt — two of our best presidents — has now turned his attention to the real lemons, and evidently enjoyed himself immensely while doing so.

The first ranking of U.S. presidents was compiled in 1948 by the redoubtable Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr., who polled 55 of his most distinguished colleagues. He and his son Arthur Jr., updated that list several times over the past five decades, sticking to the consensus method. Miller advertises his list as "purely subjective," although he claims a certain objectivity for his subjectivity by noting that in 13 presidential elections, he has voted for seven Democrats, four Republicans, and two third-party candidates, and that two of the presidents he voted for are on his list. In ascending order of badness, that list is as follows: Jimmy Carter, William Howard Taft, Benjamin Harrison, Calvin Coolidge, Ulysses S. Grant, Andrew Johnson, Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, Warren G. Harding, and Richard Nixon. And if Bill Clinton continues on his present trajectory, he bids fair to make the cut in time for the paperback.

The book allots one chapter to each president, cataloguing his blunders and chronicling his rise from deserved obscurity (it also features an epilogue on the two "most overrated" presidents, Kennedy and Jefferson). As a former Senate staffer and Baltimore Sun reporter, Miller has good horse sense about the game of politics, but what stands out are his anecdotes, most of them humorous or just plain bizarre. The absurdities really pile up here, what with the 350-lb. Taft getting stuck in the White House bathtub, Harrison being elected by paid "repeaters" who literally voted early and often, Coolidge setting off the White House alarms and then hiding behind a curtain to see his staff scramble, and Andy Johnson drunkenly shouting, "I am a plebeian!" at his inauguration. Warren Harding groping one of his many mistresses in a five-foot-square closet, Jimmy Carter giving a wan "fireside chat" on TV while the log in the fireplace "perversely sputters out", and, of course, the Checkers speech.

Miller revels in epithets and invective and usually pulls them off. While it matters little to history that Taft wore size 54 pajamas or that Harrison looked like a "medieval gnome", it is all perfectly legitimate grist for the satire mill. Occasionally, however, Miller indulges in a cheap shot or two, and manages to do a real disservice to Grant, who comes across as a borderline illiterate. Far from it, the general has a serious claim to be the best writer ever to inhabit the White House. His Personal Memoirs is an objective, still useful study of the Civil War.

Behind all the cracks lies a real seriousness of purpose, and Miller's basic criterion for inclusion in his list is: "How badly did they damage the nation they were supposed to serve?" Nixon damaged the nation actively, by subverting the constitution and undermining our faith in our very system of government. Most of the worst presidents took their toll more passively, by being weak and vacillating, creating an atmosphere friendly to corruption or even, in the case of Coolidge, doing absolutely nothing. Notably, three



Nixon: He damaged the nation actively as president

of them — Pierce, Buchanan and Johnson — are on the list because they were Southern sympathizers in addition to being inept, and so either fed the fire of secession or stood in the way of Reconstruction and betterment for blacks.

If the story has a moral, it is that "America can survive, and make progress, even with bad presidents." We have confidence that our system is too strong to stand or fall by the doings of one person. Foreigners sometimes wonder why Americans seem to prefer lackluster, even dumb men to occupy the highest office in the land. Is it simply poor judgment or the famous American anti-intellectualism? Perhaps our taste for mediocrities derives at least partly from a healthy impulse: a democratic skepticism of the man on the white horse, a suspicion that too much talent and too many big ideas can lead to trouble.

Missing in Argentina

Colm Toibin

TALES FROM THE BLUE ARCHIVES
By Lawrence Thornton
Doubleday. 272 pp. $22.95

IN MAY 1985 in Buenos Aires, as the trial continued of the generals who had fought the Falklands War and overseen the disappearance of many thousands of people, crowds queued to see a film called La Historia Oficial, for which Argentine actress Norma Aleandre had won a Best Actress award in Cannes. The film told the story of a history teacher and her husband who had a beautiful child, given to them after being stolen by the security forces from a left-wing couple who had disappeared. The central dramatic moment in the film occurred when the child's grandmother discovered where the child was and wanted it back.

For those of us attending the trial and listening to harrowing stories of torture and murder, it was a useful reminder that the trial would not be the end of things, that all over Argentina there were children being brought up by people who had obtained them illegally.

In Lawrence Thornton's third novel about the dirty war and its aftermath, Tales From The Blue Archives, Manfredo and Tomas are also being brought up by loving parents and are also being sought by their grandmother.

What happened in Argentina in the late 1970s and early 1980s is immensely dramatic. Nobody understood what was occurring all around them. People phoned the police in search of loved ones, not realizing that the security forces were the kidnappers. People were held and tortured; many were drugged and thrown into the sea. Families went on believing that their loved ones would turn up. All of this was documented first by a commission headed by the novelist Ernesto Sabato, and then by the trial itself.

In his novel Imagining Argentina, published in 1987, Thornton explored the grief and sadness and drama of what happened but added one ingredient: magic. His main character had the power to see where the disappeared were and what had been done to them. The book had an odd discrepancy between the fate of the characters, which was part of recent history and still full of unresolved pain, and the plot, which was fantastic and, for me at least, not very credible.

Thornton's new novel is more precise and sticks more closely to what is likely or possible, even though the boys' grandmother locates them by using a medium. Thornton ably depicts an army general, a man who adores his family and his caged birds but who was deeply involved in the dirty war and responsible for handing over Tomas and Manfredo to their new parents.

The writing is clear and simple. We get a vivid picture of the grandmother's determination as she slowly makes her way to the boys' house to take them away from the two people who have brought them up. The journey back to Buenos Aires with these shocked, unwilling teenagers is superbly described. Thereafter, the focus is on the parents, who have lost their children and may face prison, and, for a while, on the boys themselves.

This is fascinating stuff indeed; the transcripts of the trial could yield infinite dramatic moments for a writer to explore. But the book falls apart as it focuses on the father's efforts to snatch the boys a second time. The boys themselves fade from the main body of the novel just as their new life begins and thus the momentum of the story is lost.

Although Thornton is a skilful storyteller, there is always the feeling, as there was in Imagining Argentina, that his fiction tells us rather less about those who suffered in Argentina, and their context, than a work of nonfiction which used real stories, would do.

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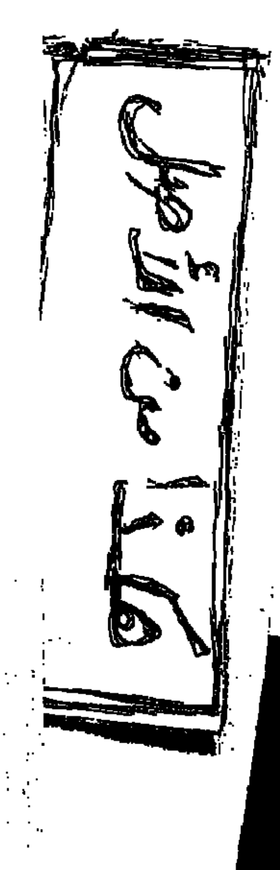
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Women in Poland lose habit of submission

Neil Bowdler in Warsaw

BARBARA would sometimes stand by as her son-in-law beat her daughter Ewa senseless. When she found the 18-year-old with her eyes bloodied, her body swollen and the sheets blood-splattered, she would simply say to her: "Why don't you change the bed linen?"

Barbara, aged 46, chose to believe her son-in-law's account: that Ewa was mentally ill, with sado-masochistic tendencies.

She believed him the day Ewa escaped to a gynaecologist and her husband punished her by calmly cutting off her toe in a secluded wood.

In front of the police, in front of doctors, Barbara would testify against her daughter, and help send her back to her husband whenever she escaped.

Barbara sought refuge from her own husband, but she says: "A wife's role was to listen, to submit to her husband's will — everyone said that."

His vodka bouts, punches and kicks led on to rape, strangulation, attempts to suffocate her with a pillow, and threats to throw her from their eighth-floor balcony or kill her and her children with a kitchen knife.

Yet she went on dutifully as the perfect Polish wife and mother, sure she would receive little support from friends and colleagues.

Not until 1993, 12 years after the violence began, and after her husband kicked her so hard he fractured her spine and nearly paralysed her, did she decide to file criminal charges and start divorce proceedings. "It's a terribly long time, too long," she says. "I tried to hide it from the world, to make a family."

The cases of Ewa and Barbara would, like so many others, have gone unnoticed were it not for their unprecedented step, in this conservative Catholic society, of braving publicity and speaking out at tribunals on domestic violence organised by a Warsaw support group, the Centre for Women's Rights.

The first tribunal was held just over two years ago. The centre's chief, Urszula Nowakowska, believes they have helped drive into the public domain an issue which was for many years considered a private, family matter.

More than 40 years of communism, during which all social ills were glossed over, has undoubtedly played a part, as have subsidised vodka prices. But the roots go deeper in a country in which female martyrdom is a tradition and the family has an almost mythological status.

The clergy may be eager to play a positive role, says Ms Nowakowska, but there are too many stories like that of the woman shouted out of a Warsaw church for announcing during confession that she intended to leave her violent husband.

"The Polish mother must suffer for her country . . . if she has a cross to bear, she must carry it in silence."

But the victims are now speaking out and the domestic media are listening, a debate perhaps stirred by the country's first national hotline for victims, the Blue Line. In recent weeks, too, there has been a national awareness campaign, which has confronted Poles with graphic billboard-size images of victims.

Marta Ziemska, who runs the hotline, thinks the campaign has provoked the beaters: husbands have called in asking for an end to this "meddling" in their private affairs.

She says Polish society is still 20 years behind the West in confronting these issues. Support groups now face the challenges posed by the Solidarity-led government, which is committed to traditional Catholic family values. It has replaced the departments for women and children with an Office for Family Affairs, which is headed by an arch-conservative.

Bo zupa była za słona
NIEBIESKA LINIA

Poland's first campaign to highlight domestic violence includes the Blue Line, a hotline for victims, and billboard posters like this

Celebrities challenged

Jon Henley on the day Robert De Niro faced a Paris investigator's searching questions about call-girls

THE lawyer was smiling. Silver-haired, expansive behind his ornate antique desk, he was finding this all — as is the French way when dealing with such matters — really rather amusing.

"My client", he said, "admits to having shaken the hands of two of these women." He paused for effect, choosing his words carefully. "What he admits to doing with the third is censored." The expected burst of laughter was an echo of another era, another Paris. A time when a gentleman's whims were winked at, when princes, politicians and poets lounged on chaise-longues in mirrored and gilt-trimmed reception rooms, chatted languidly, smoked a cigar or two. And then followed one of Madame's more alluring girls upstairs for a spot of what they came for.

But this was not the Belle Epoque. It took place this month and Georges Kiejman, one of France's most high-profile barristers, was addressing a battery of television cameras and reporters on behalf of his client, one Robert De Niro. The Hollywood star had admittedly been with one of the women, he implied, but no money had changed hands.

It is now more than half a century since the closure of the state-regulated brothels that gave Paris its frills-and-frou-frou reputation for offering the naughtiest night out in Europe. The law that finally shut them down was tabled by a crusading communist councillor, Marthe Richard, herself at one time a registered prostitute in Nancy.

Prostitution, of course, did not disappear with them. Government figures put the sex industry's turnover at something in the region of $1.5 billion a year. One Frenchman in 10 is happy to admit to having had his first sexual experience with one of the country's estimated 30,000 prostitutes, and one in three men over the age of 20 admit to making occasional use of their services.

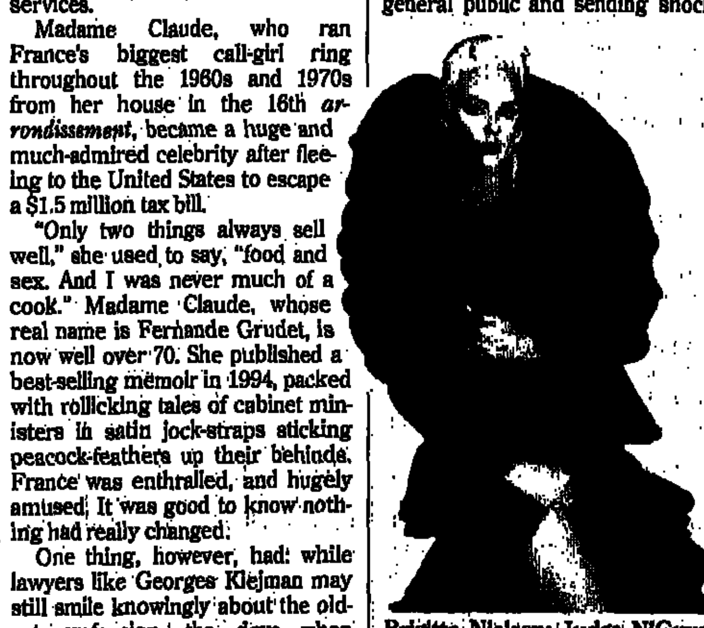
Madame Claude, who ran France's biggest call-girl ring throughout the 1960s and 1970s from her house in the 16th *arrondissement*, became a huge and much-admired celebrity after fleeing to the United States to escape a $1.5 million tax bill.

"Only two things always sell well," she used to say, "food and sex. And I was never much of a cook." Madame Claude, whose real name is Fernande Grudet, is now well over 70. She published a best-selling memoir in 1994, packed with rollicking tales of cabinet ministers in satin jock-straps sticking peacock-feathers up their behinds. France was enthralled, and hugely amused. It was good to know nothing had really changed.

One thing, however, had: while lawyers like Georges Kiejman may still smile knowingly about the oldest profession, the days when judges and senior policemen could afford to do so, too, seem definitively to be over. As Robert De Niro discovered to his chagrin.

The Oscar-winning star of Raging Bull and Taxi Driver was in town to film scenes for a new film, Ronin, directed by John Frankenheimer. According to Kiejman, six or eight policemen showed up at his hotel. The actor accompanied the officers to the headquarters of the vice squad in the Rue Lutèce, and then to the offices of a young and ambitious investigating magistrate, Frédéric N'Guyen.

For more than a year, Judge N'Guyen has been titillating the general public and sending shockwaves through government and diplomatic circles with allegations that the vice ring he is investigating variously involves French and foreign film stars, media personalities, politicians, international arms dealers, Gulf State rulers, and influential businessmen from America, Britain, Indonesia and the Middle East.




Brigitte Nielsen: Judge N'Guyen is keen to question her PHOTO: LAZIC

Among the people he has reportedly questioned are Wojtek Fibak, the former Polish tennis star, Alain Sarde, a French film producer who has worked with directors such as Roman Polanski and Bertrand Tavernier, and Paul Barril, a former deputy commander of the élite National Gendarme Intervention Group and chief of security for the late President François Mitterrand.

Others who have not been named are said to include the mayor of a large French town, a former French cabinet minister, a singer, and the managing director of a well-known French cosmetics firm.

The judge is also said to be keen to question Brigitte Nielsen, the statuesque Danish former model and actress, and ex-wife of Sylvester Stallone. She was reportedly offered $1 million by an Arab prince if she would spend the night with him.

Much of N'Guyen's information comes from a shadowy Lebanese businessmen called Nazihabdulatif Al-Ladki, one of several people placed under formal investigation — one step short of being charged — in the affair.

More came from Alain Meyer, a French doctor in Cannes on the Riviera. He has reportedly admitted to police that he had carried out Aids and syphilis tests on several girls who had been "bought" by Middle Eastern businessmen and flown to destinations all over the world for a fee of up to $10,000 a night.

"I can give you the names of several personalities or Arab princes who have, directly or through intermediaries, asked me to carry out tests on young women," Meyer allegedly told the investigators.

The two people viewed by N'Guyen as the linchpins of the ring have been in detention since January. They are Annika Brumark, a 49-year-old Swedish former model who acted as its madam, and Jean-Pierre Bourgeois, a 50-year-old soft porn photographer for magazines such as Lui, New Look and Penthouse, who allegedly functioned as its talent scout. Several call-girls have also been interviewed, and it was three of them, according to police, who told the judge that they had slept with De Niro. The actor was questioned only as a witness in the affair, and no charges are likely to be filed against him.

None the less Kiejman saw these events as a massive publicity stunt by Judge N'Guyen, and has filed a formal complaint for "violation of secrecy in an investigation" and "obstruction of freedom of movement". The interrogation could have been accomplished by two or three policemen in a couple of hours, and privately, Kiejman argued. "They only had three questions they wanted my client to answer."

But France is already in the grip, once more, of its favourite kind of scandal. Did De Niro really make use of the call-girl ring? And are there any other juicy names lurking? The silver-haired lawyer certainly found it amusing. "It astonishes me", he said with a wink, "that anyone could imagine my client would ever have paid for a woman. Robert De Niro has never paid for a woman."

Letter from Helsinki Tim Bird

It's good to talk

THE TRAIN to St Petersburg leaves Helsinki at six in the morning. Three Finnish businessmen sit in the restaurant car sipping their coffee, chewing their rolls. On the table in front of them, spread like weapons, are three mobile phones.

They sit in silence as the train pulls through Helsinki's suburbs, but it has only gone a kilometre or two before one of the devices emits its nasty synthetic jingle. All three men are quick on the draw. The lucky one gazes philosophically out of the window, the black bar pressed to his head. His companions stare at him with a mixture of respect and envy as he snaps instructions into the ether.

After the call is finished he fidgets lovingly with the apparatus, smoothing the buttons with his fingertips. Then the glum trio waits in silence for another call.

Every day similar scenes are played out from one end of Finland to the other. This is the land of the mobile phone. There are more mobiles in Finland per head of population than anywhere else in the world. But it's not just a question of numerical proliferation. The *kännykkä* — the widely-used slang word derived from the word for "hand" — has evolved from status symbol and fashion accessory to physical appendage. If you don't have one, you're deficient. And if you do have one but decline to respond to its shrill demand, you are regarded with incredulity.

The invasion of the mobile into every corner of life has resulted from various circumstances. On one level, it is a logical development of the long-established Finnish fondness for the telephone in general. The Finns are known, not entirely fairly, as a dour, untalkative race, but you would never guess it to hear them on the telephone. The telephone must be answered, no matter what. Likewise the mobile: most owners ignore the off-switch. Consequently, no visit to the shop, pub or restaurant, no walk through central Helsinki, no bus or tram ride is complete without the startling alarm of an incoming call. This is a nation that talks on the phone even when it visits the lavatory.

Local calls in Finland are traditionally cheap, and this has also contributed to the phenomenal spread of the device. Another factor is the high international profile of the Finnish-based company Nokia, whose stated marketing philosophy is to make mobile telephones as common as wristwatches by the turn of the century.

The success of Nokia is characteristic of a Finnish ingenuity that has allowed it to rely less on its single commercial natural resource — its forest — and to diversify into high-technology industries. It is also a reflection of the Finnish affection for new technological gadgets in all shapes and forms. Finns also head the world per-capita Internet-connection league. Banking systems here are the most automated and sophisticated in the world. Digital TV has already been launched on a trial basis. Medical technology is also among the most advanced.

Meanwhile the mobile phone is no longer simply a device for speech transmission: in Finland you can already dial a car-wash or a record on a juke-box, and more applications are being devised by the day. A country of 5 million people covering an area much larger than the whole of the UK has been shrunk psychologically by this proliferation of technology.

There are those who argue (given that there is any argument at all on the subject) that the mobile phone is an instrument of freedom, then contradict themselves by defining freedom as continuous and constant contact.

There has been no conspicuous debate on etiquette, a paradoxical absence in a country that sets so much store by formal codes of conduct. And an obsessive regard for safety does not extend to restrictions on the use of mobiles while driving.

This is not to deny that the device has its uses. But in their rush to embrace new technology in all its forms, the Finns seem reluctant to confront a familiar but urgently pertinent question: who controls the technology — the unaccountable, impenetrable organisations which provide it, or the wider population it is supposed to serve?



On reflection . . . the Kagyu Samye Ling Tibetan Centre in Eskdalemuir, Dumfries

Fugitives from the modern world find guide to sanctuary

Ruaridh Nicoll

THE church, long accused of being behind the times, is now finding itself back in fashion, besieged by people tired of the endless bustle of modern life.

A new edition of the Good Retreat Guide was published in Britain this month, its bulk dedicated to aiding the spiritually-drained to get back in touch with themselves in the confines of monasteries, abbeys and temples.

It is not just the churches which are benefiting. There are New Age retreats dedicated to finding one's inner child and Celtic spiritualism. Sanctuaries are booked up across the country. "Something is stirring," said Brother Stuart, of the Priory of Our Lady in Burford, Oxfordshire, which used to see one or two guests every few weeks. Now all 12 places are booked for months ahead.

In the United States last year more than 3 million people visited retreats, beating at monastic doors to escape stress of modern life. It is a wild swing from the days when it was just little old ladies who would disappear to relax for a day or two.

"We invite guests to join in as much of the monastic life as they want," said Brother Stuart. "It can be terribly intrusive for us, especially when we have groups of clergy, but often it adds immeasurably to life here."

The third Good Retreat Guide lists more than 400 retreats across Britain, Ireland, France and Spain.

The guide's author, Stafford Whiteaker, said he thought the demand — which he estimates has doubled in the past five years — was due to the retreats "answering a need". He added: "People have the house, the relationship, the job but they say: 'Hey, is there another dimension to where my life is going?' "

Those running the retreats are responding to this by offering a variety of options to visitors.

People can spend time doing almost anything, from painting icons to gardening or indulging in long periods of silence.

"Retreats are nothing new but the opportunity to do it more creatively is new," said Paddy Lane of the National Retreat Association in London.

Despite the religious overtones, Lane points out that few retreats demand that their guests hold any particular beliefs. The point is relaxation and inner reflection.

"You know you can let go of the issues bothering you as soon as you arrive," she said. "When you go on holiday it can take days to unwind."

The retreats are usually very simple; luxury has never been part of the monastic life. They are also very cheap, usually coming in at under $50 a night.

Guests also tend to be a varied bunch. Brother Stuart said one of the strangest combinations he has seen was a high court judge, a policeman and a newly released criminal all talking to each other after a meal.

Christy Casley, who helps to run the non-religious Self Realisation Meditation Healing Centre near Yeovil, Somerset, said that they send people back to the world changed.

"When they go back they have more to offer," she said. "It is part of self-development."

The Good Retreat Guide is published by Rider at £12.99

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

***WHAT'S* wrong with cannibalism?**

IT involves eating meat. — *John Parrott, British Vegetarian Society*

LET US assume that there is nothing inherently wrong with eating human flesh. How do you get the flesh? Do you eat people who have died young, presumably because of some accident or disease? They wouldn't be very appetising. Do you eat people who have died of old age? No — we don't make beef out of geriatric cows because it doesn't taste nice. We are left with the hygienic killing of tasty-looking individuals, ie, murder. — *John Furlong, Liverpool*

ON A purely medical level, it can pass on disease. A famous example is the cannibalistic tribe who, when their relatives behaved in a peculiar manner and died a few months later, ate their brains. This was thought to ensure they inherited their wisdom. What they did inherit was Kuru, a disease similar to Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. They then behaved in a peculiar manner and died. The disease is now unheard of. So what is wrong with eating vegetarians? — *Gavin Jamie, Cheltenham*

***WHY* do stock markets often crash in October?**

MARK TWAIN was the first to observe: "It often happens that the stock market falls in October; the other times are in January, February, March, April . . ." — *Paul Keenan, London*

***WHERE* and what was the original ivory tower?**

THE ivory palace in Psalm 45 (and elsewhere in the Bible) is probably that of King Ahab (869-850 BC). Ivory — for decoration rather than as building material — was used in the ancient Near East as far back as the 15th century BC. — *Kieran Coury, Catholic Media Office, London*

PRINCETON University's Graduate College tower, completed in 1913, became known as the Ivory Tower because one of the benefactors was William Procter (of Procter and Gamble), manufacturer of Ivory Soap. — *Jo Wood, Leicester*

***IS THERE* any advantage in having traffic lights which include amber, rather than switching straight from red to green?**

OVERPOPULATION is a major world problem and the amber is a part of the solution. — *William O Moeser, Springfield, Vermont, USA*

THERE is a once-important historical reason for the amber light. Until about 20 years ago, all the lights at a junction were controlled by one mechanical switch and all the lights had to change at the same time. The amber light was thus considered necessary to prevent mid-junction collisions between those who did not or could not stop when the light changed from green and those who would leap away the instant their light turned green. This is no longer true with today's control apparatus and the operation of the different lights can be staggered. As the "Stop on amber" instruction is so widely ignored there is a strong case for eliminating the amber between green and red. — *(Prof) Michael Cable, Sheffield*

TRAFFIC lights in France switch straight from red to green in an attempt to prevent premature light jumping, but the amber is retained for the green-amber-red sequence. French drivers routinely ignore the amber — and, to judge from the number of accidents recorded, also ignore the red. Perhaps, more usefully, French traffic lights are often switched to an amber-only flashing light in all directions during the hours of darkness when traffic is lighter. This allows drivers to proceed with caution. It seems to work well. — *Keith Vincent, Magalas, France*

Any answers?

***DOES* a cold shower stop lust?** — *Matthew Hurst, Elie, Scotland*

***WHAT* is the longest English word with no recurring letters?** — *David Sharp, Bath*

***WHO* gave the world's first benefit concert and what was it in aid of?** — *Allison L LiCalsi, New Jersey, USA*

***ARE* sarcasm and irony found in all human cultures?** — *Evan M Corcoran, London*

***WHAT* are the plastic bits at the end of shoelaces called?** — *Peter Clarke, Preston, Lancashire*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/

Are historical epics such as Amistad dishonest, or do they convey human truths that text books cannot? **Stuart Jeffries** and **Simon Hattenstone** report

Slaves to the past

THE HISTORIANS are sharpening their quills. Academic bile is flying in all directions. And newspaper columnists are ransacking the good ship Amistad. We've seen it plenty of times before. In fact, we see it every time a historical film is made.

From DW Griffith's 1916 movie Intolerance, through Gone With The Wind to Oliver Stone's febrile historical narratives right up to Disney's dalliances with Hercules and Pocahontas, movies, especially Hollywood movies, have been portrayed as unreliable guides to the past.

Amistad, the new Steven Spielberg film, is about a mutiny of African slaves on the eponymous ship off the Cuban coast. The Amistad was eventually captured by an American naval ship off Connecticut and the Africans imprisoned. Their demand to be freed and returned to their homelands subsequently went through three trials, culminating in a hearing at the Supreme Court.

The historian Simon Schama, writing in the New Yorker, takes Spielberg to task for misunderstanding what the Amistad incident was actually about. The climactic moment of the film comes when Anthony Hopkins, as ex-president John Quincy Adams, tells the Supreme Court: "We have come to understand that who we are is who we were." A trumpet sounds over Adams's rhetoric, and in the United States at least, as Schama says, "hearts around the theatre swell like popcorn". For Adams's appeal here is to the Founding Fathers' assertion of the liberty and equality of all mankind.

"As a clinching argument about the legality of treating the Africans as slaves or free men, this makes no sense," Schama argues, "not least because the case turned neither on the morality nor on the legality of slavery in America, but on the slave trade on the high seas." And, to add insult to historical injury, Adams's speech actually took eight hours, spread over two days (during which time one of the most odious judges died in his sleep), rather than the five minutes of damp-eyed oration he's allotted in the film.

Amistad's great obfuscation, historically, is to somehow imply that slavery disappeared with the triumph of the Amistad case, complete with Southern rednecks holding up their hands and admitting that they were wrong all along.

Once again, it seems, the facts haven't been allowed to stand in the way of a good story. But, then, has history ever been an objective science? Thomas Macaulay once said that history was a compound of poetry and philosophy. As Schama points out, from its beginning, history-writing has been a work of imaginative re-creation. Even Thucydides put imagined words into Pericles's mouth for his funeral oration. And Herodotus used sources indiscriminately and mingled myth and ritual in his discursive narratives.

Is what these historians have done so very far removed from the great historical movies; say, Gillo Pontecorvo's The Battle Of Algiers, which puts fictional characters in real events?

For its part, Spielberg's Amistad takes liberties with the past, not only by trimming Adams's speech and mawkishly manipulating its rhetoric, but by creating a composite anti-slavery campaigner, played by Morgan Freeman, and by selecting some aspects from the Amistad story and ignoring others. The question surely is, are such decisions justified?

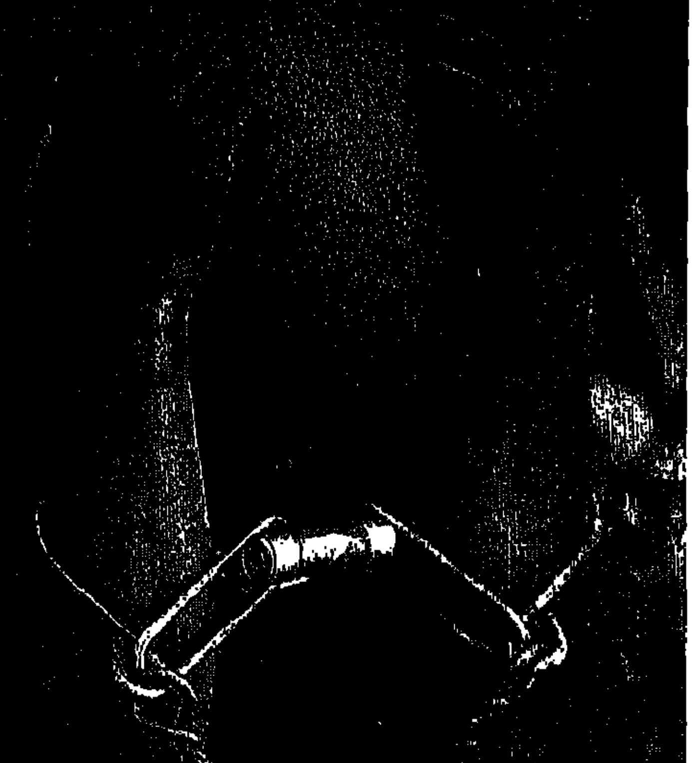
Movies to do with slavery are only slightly more common than hens' teeth, and so a good one would be a wonderful and perhaps edifying thing. After all, as a Washington Post editorial suggested: "Like it or not, more and more Americans learn much of their history from movies and television . . . These images form our collective images of times past . . . Amistad is introducing millions to a powerful chapter that was not taught in most classrooms."

The film has been accompanied by a study guide that has been distributed to US high schools. This proved too much for some historians. Columbia professor Eric Foner, writing in the New York Times, for example, angrily condemned the information being supplied to schoolkids: "The study guide erases the distinction between fact and fabrication, urging students, for example, to study the film's composite character [the Morgan Freeman character] rather than real African-Americans on whom he is based."

He added: "The learning kit claims that the Supreme Court's decision to free the Africans aboard the Amistad was a 'turning point in the struggle to end slavery in the United States'. The truth is that the Amistad case revolved around the Atlantic slave trade — outlawed by international treaty long before 1840 — and had nothing to do with slavery in this country. In the study guide, students are not told that in the 19th century it was perfectly possible to condemn the importation of slaves from Africa while simultaneously defending slavery and the flourishing slave trade in America."

Ken Loach, a director who is regularly attacked for conflating historical incidents and inserting fictional characters, argues: "It's important to be accurate but not to dwell on that academic accuracy because it kills the film. Historical reconstructions have academic accuracy but they become waxwork films."

And yet Loach's films have been attacked for their inaccuracies, chiefly by people who disagree with his politics. "With Hidden Agenda, the London Times ran a piece slagging me off for confusing fact and fiction, and waxing eloquent about the responsibilities of film-makers. In the same week, Reversal Of Fortune, the film about Claus von Bulow, came out and they completely forgot to mention that it was a real event, with real people speaking words they never spoke in rooms that they had never been in — completely confusing fact and fiction. But because they had no political quarrel with it, they didn't mention it. So there's a hidden agenda in the way people discuss historical re-creations."



Scenes from Amistad (above) and Michael Collins (below)

But the factual sniping can prove very destructive to film-makers. Neil Jordan, for one. "I don't think I'll make another historical film, not after Michael Collins [his biopic of the Irish republican hero]," he says. "Even before the film was made, there were quotes from historians — with their own agendas of course — saying it was a despicable distortion."

For Michael Wood, Professor of English at Princeton and the author of America In The Movies, accuracy, obviously never sufficient for great art, may not even be necessary or desirable. He says: "If something is inaccurate, one should ask what's the effect of the inaccuracy. Smaller inaccuracies can serve larger truths. Clearly it's good to get things right, but people who complain about inaccuracies normally have an agenda. They argue 'facts speak for themselves'. But those tend to be conservative claims — the facts are conservative until proved otherwise."

As Wood says, the notion that film-makers should merely be concerned with getting the facts straight may be inimical to art, but it's one that has proved remarkably effective for conservative critics seeking to take apart liberal or left-wing historical movies. Pull the thread of a minor factual *faux pas*, and the whole edifice falls apart.

"I like it when a movie-maker has an angle and it's made perfectly clear. A film shouldn't just confirm our prejudices, it should test us in a way," says Wood.

Schama argues that Amistad fails to test us for exactly this reason — because it plays to our prejudices. The protagonists have views and even speech patterns very like ours today, and Schama despairs at Spielberg's inability to admit "the otherness of the past, its obstinate unfamiliarity, the integrity of its remoteness". Instead, he says, the film nose-dives into ancestor-worship by making those ancestors too like us.

Schama has a point. Many film-makers don't even attempt to distinguish past from present. Indeed, they try to convince us the past is the present because they believe that's the only way they can get an audience interested. In James Cameron's Titanic, Kate Winslet gives a Nosey Parker the finger — historically daft, but definitely a crowd-pleaser.

Michael Wood concedes that it's rather sad "if we can't possibly interest ourselves in any story that is not relevant to us. It's like saying we're not interested in people unless they're members of the family."

But as he and Jordan and Loach are quick to point out, the relationship between past and present is more complex than Schama would have it. The past is no longer a different country, and history is no longer the Gradgrindian consensus of Facts, Facts, Facts. Past and present are inseparable, not just for the film-maker but also for the audience.

Take Ireland, for example, Jordan says. "That issue is fought out daily in the media, academic circles and on telly . . . So when you make a movie about the war of independence 70 years earlier, you can't help but get involved in the contemporary crossfire."

Or, as Ken Loach puts it: "The only reason to make a historical film is because it illuminates the present."



'Even before Michael Collins was made, there were quotes from historians saying it was a despicable distortion'

— Neil Jordan

A revolution remembered

Jon Henley in Paris

IT MARKED, said the novelist Victor Hugo, "a vigorous hatred of anarchy, a tender and profound love for the people".

Thirty years after the student-worker uprisings of 1968 and more than two centuries since the storming of the Bastille, France this month is again showing its respect for revolt.

But Hugo's words, on a signed portrait that is part of an exhibition in the national assembly's gilded Galerie des Fêtes, mark the anniversary of a different revolution.

The events of 1848 are often overshadowed by the uprising that saw Louis XVI guillotined and the Rights of Man declared, half a century earlier. But opening the exhibition last week, Laurent Fabius, the Speaker of the French parliament, described 1848 as "one of our defining moments".

Although it lasted only until 1851, when Louis Napoleon staged a *coup d'état*, the Second Republic established fundamental modern reforms. For the first time the entire male population of a major state was qualified to vote. The death penalty was abolished for political crimes, slavery was abolished in the colonies, the right to work was proclaimed and a limit set to the working day.

The uprising triggered protests and street battles in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary and Italy, in what became known as the "Springtime of the People".

The exhibition will travel later this year to Turin, Prangins in Switzerland, and Nuremberg.

The revolution it celebrates began peaceably enough. As part of a campaign for electoral reform, liberal and moderate republican figures organised a series of open-air feasts to circumvent laws against political meetings. Their campaign was due to culminate in a mass banquet in Paris, but an anxious King Louis-Philippe banned it.

On February 23, 1848, troops guarding the foreign ministry on the Boulevard des Capucines fired on a crowd protesting at the ban. Within hours some 1,500 barricades had been thrown up in the working-class *quartiers*.

It was over very quickly. The king abdicated and fled to England. The Second Republic, headed by a provisional government made up mainly of surprised republican politicians and journalists, was proclaimed.

"It was the Republic without the terror," Mr Fabius said. "It added fraternity to the liberty and equality vaunted in 1789."

It did not last long. The general election of April showed the rest of the country did not approve of the events in Paris. A reactionary majority was returned, prompting workers to take to the streets again.

Several thousand died under fire from government troops, and more in reprisals afterwards.

At the exhibition there are oil paintings laden with symbols, showing "La République" — a stern-faced woman with an olive-branch in one hand and a sword in the other — standing astride the globe, an allegory of the longed-for Universal Republic.

One is entitled: "The judgment of God: the reign of kings is over, that of the people begin."

As the exhibition underlines, they still live in hope.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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First impressions, endlessly repeated

ART
Adrian Searle

PIERRE BONNARD had a wandering eye, a flickering, dancing, glancing look. A new retrospective of his paintings at London's Tate Gallery (until May 17) follows the artist's gaze from the bedroom to the kitchen, from the garden to the bath, to the canvas and back again. The exhibition reveals Bonnard's art in an endless succession of — to use Willem de Kooning's phrase — slipping glimpses. But while De Kooning described himself as a "slipping glimpser", Bonnard's work is full of judderings, tics, pauses, false moves. His paintings cause the visual world to shudder, blur, to come in and out of focus even as we look.

The Tate show, of 113 paintings and works on paper, is too big. Sometimes I feel like I'm wading through Bonnard, drowning in Bonnard. My eye grows nauseated by his excess, his repetitiousness, his cloying colour and claustrophobic interiors, his over-planted gardens and all that skin, skin dabbed at, poked and prodded at, rubbed-out and repainted. His paintings make and unmake the world, glance and stammer at it. Certain artists, for one reason or another, shouldn't be given the blockbuster treatment; in the case of Bonnard his paintings are just too optically rich to be digestible *en masse*. But I suppose the economics of exhibition-making and museum funding make such shows inevitable, even though, for most viewers, the experience of looking becomes the most exhausting form of art tourism.

The Bonnard show takes us from early, intimist still lifes, prosaic street scenes and croquet games, to his late self-portraits and bathroom interiors. Bonnard's ostensible subjects — domestic life, intimate moments, his own portrait, that querulous, myopic apparition in the mirror which he returned to again and again — never really altered. And, most important of all, there was Maria Boursin, who called herself Marthe de Méligny, a girl Bonnard met in the street in 1893, and whom he secretly married as late as 1925. They lived together until her death in 1942.

The show's earliest painting of Marthe, a fuzzy little image painted the year they met, shows her pulling on a black stocking while seated on a bed. She's there in the bedroom, with her stockings, five more times before 1900, and Bonnard painted her all of 384 times. She dresses, undresses and dresses again. She splays on the bed, or sits naked, idly playing with the cats, as Bonnard himself gets dressed on the further side of a screen. In a painting from 1914 Marthe sits in the kitchen in her dressing gown, pensive and self-absorbed. She looks down. Two little chips of vermillion between the jugs and bowls ranged on the table in front of her drag our eyes away, catch us in our scrutiny of her. Her pose, we learn, is derived from Greek statuary, but this feels like the most ordinary of sullen mornings.

Marthe potters in the kitchen, feeds the dogs and cats, but most of all she bathes. She bathes continually. Bathing and moping, indeed, seems to be what she does best. One of the major plots of Bonnard's art is his relationship with Marthe, which itself becomes a major concern for Bonnard scholars and biographers, not least because it affected the terms and conditions under which his art flourished. Poor Marthe, was she paranoid, was she schizophrenic? She certainly became suspicious, resentful and anti-social.

Marthe in the tub was more than a motif for Bonnard. At times, the world of Bonnard's painting seems bounded by the bath and the kitchen table. Nature outside the window may have been a riot, but the best of his paintings stayed indoors (in fact, it is difficult to look at Bonnard's landscapes without thinking, first of all, of all his feeble followers). And, in his self-portraits, it is in the bathroom mirror that we regularly find him; weedy-looking, balding, with that irritating little moustache of his, his little blinking eyes. Posing like a boxer, with one arm raised, fists clenched, he looks ineffectual, tremendously sad, sallow in yellow light. And again, after Marthe has died, once more in the bathroom mirror: old, hairless, looming over the toiletries and a hairbrush he no longer needs.



Bathed in light . . . Bonnard's Nude In The Bath (1936)

THE trajectory of Bonnard's career is one in which, although the geography of his paintings becomes more narrow, the scope of his art itself deepens, and we find him depicting an ever stranger world. Everything he needed was in front of him, although he never approached the simplest thing head on. He sidled up to his objects, he glimpsed them, he talked of trying to "show what one sees when one enters a room all of a sudden".

The surfaces of Bonnard's paintings, and the images of objects and spaces within them, are full of breaks, rushes of paintwork, apparent blunders, objects that his brushwork and colour seem at once to construct and to destroy. Forms are constantly breached, ventilated by the space around them, swallowed-up, not so much deformed as unformed. Things vibrate, waver and tilt. In one painting reproduced in the catalogue (but which isn't on show in London, though it will be in the Museum of Modern Art version of the show in New York), we see Bonnard at breakfast. He peers into the marmalade jar as though he's never seen one before and doesn't know what marmalade is. This little fragment of image tells us all we need to know: Bonnard, short-sighted though he was, was trying to render objects, forms and spaces as though he'd never seen such things before.

Oddly, he hardly ever painted from life, but rather conjured things seen from memory. His recall skidded around things, the memory of the moment, the flavour of a day.

The Spanish painter Miquel Barceló talked about Bonnard's painting as an "overdose". He was right: Bonnard's work is often so over-painted, so over-rich that it becomes difficult to look at for any extended period. This show is, indeed, an overdose. This is a pity, as any of Bonnard's works repay extended looking. It is easy to miss so much, for one's own eyes begin to slide and wallow and jump — like a needle on a dusty record — from passage to passage, from painting to painting, and one loses the weird interconnectedness between things that gives Bonnard so much of his character as a painter.

This difficulty — a sort of disturbing feedback which builds on itself as we walk through the exhibition — is relieved in the final room, which contains only five paintings. This makes this last space even more dramatic, more shocking than it otherwise would be. On each of three walls hangs one of Bonnard's late, large paintings of Marthe soaking in the bath, surrounded by rich pattern and wet tiles. The whole painting is bathed in spectral light. She appears indifferent to everything. On the end wall hang two of Bonnard's late self-portraits. In one, his eyes are black lozenges. We seem to trespass, as we walk in, not between artist and model, but between a man and his wife. It feels like a dead world, given a life by Bonnard the painter so much missed by Bonnard the man.

The soul's migration

POP
Caroline Sullivan

SUCH is the antipathy in some quarters towards Paul Weller that his endorsement of 52-year-old Chicago soulster Terry Callier could be the kiss of death. Which would be a great shame, for this warm and engaging album, Timepeace (Talkin' Loud), is the best soul-folk-jazz hybrid that's likely to appear this year.

It's obvious why retro-funk fan Weller digs him — he's a "real soul" merchant, with a pedigree dating back to the sixties. A familiar name on English soul-jazz dance floors in the seventies, he released four more albums, then quit music in 1983 after using the last of his money to record an unsuccessful single. He became a computer programmer at the University of Chicago, studying for a sociology degree at night. He had the dubious satisfaction of knowing that his long-deleted LPs were changing hands for "silly, silly money", none of which, of course, he saw.

As is often the case, it's taken a Brit label to revive his career, on this occasion Talkin' Loud Records. In America, the market for black male vocalists who fail to fit the category that US radio calls "urban" — he's neither hip hop nor a testosterone-laced R Kelly type — is virtually non-existent. Callier and others of his ilk almost inevitably gravitate to Europe. Timepeace was partly recorded in London, during which Callier also worked with Brit-nominated nu-folkie Beth Orton.

While the man can ooze as suggestively as Kelly, most of the time he doesn't. The lengthy Lazarus Man, whose half-spoken/half-sung stanzas invoke Dylan, would be devilishly hard to slot in alongside your Ol' Dirty Bastards. The same goes for the so-laid-back-it's-horizontal Java Sparrow, which is more Mel Tormé than Ghostface Killah.

Callier has the gift of imbuing even the slinkiest numbers — say the title song, which features Pharoah Sanders on impossibly satiny saxophone — with gravitas. On that track he predicts, purring: "Be advised, my brothers, the judgment will come soon." He even pulls off the feat on the sole rap number, Traitor To The Race. His rapping style is laced with jazzy inflections and he sounds a bit uncomfortable, but the words resound. And while he says nothing that hasn't been said by scores of full-time rappers — "Everybody knows the truth, nobody wants to say/ That brothers kill more brothers than the KKK" — even the clichés have presence. A result, then — even if Mr Dadrock does like it.

Callier: gravitas

Miles ahead of his time

JAZZ
John Fordham

PANTHALASSA was the name given to the ocean surrounding the primordial, unbroken continent. If Bill Laswell, the gifted producer and sometime free-jazz bass player, hears Miles Davis's 1970s music as an "ocean of sound", he's gone to considerable lengths to reinforce the point on the remarkable Panthalassa: The Music of Miles Davis 1969-74 (Sony), remixing and resampling several of the trumpeter's key performances to make one fluid and continuous suite.

The source material comes from the albums In A Silent Way, On The Corner and Get Up With It, when Davis was moving away from modal jazz toward a kind of impressionistic, electronic free-funk inspired by Sly Stone and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

A little of the music is significantly altered, with a few riffs sampled from elsewhere in his voluminous studio experiments. But for the most part Laswell has altered dynamics, restored discarded edits and made a piece of music of gripping coherence. For Laswell to extend the trumpeter's use of the studio as part of his creative palette seems not only legitimate but sheds a light his subject's lengthy musings with avant-rock that will be a breakthrough for all but the most dedicated Miles completists.

John McLaughlin is heard a lot more in the early stages here, sounding as lean and bluesy as he did just before he left. The guitar-like trumpet wails (manipulated by a wah-wah pedal) of the mid-1970s often sound as apposite and complementary to the surroundings as anything he did with the unplugged version. Rated X is a tabla, drums and organ groove that shuffles off ecstatically like a drum'n'bass track a quarter-century too early.

A tautness and purpose has been brought to hours of exploratory studio time from a period when Miles Davis was throwing himself, his partners and his preconceptions up in the air to see how they would fall, and set against the trip-hop and re-sampling jazz of the 1990s it sounds startlingly contemporary.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
February 22 1998

Souls cast adrift

THEATRE
Michael Billington

WHAT is David Mamet's secret? The simple answer is that he writes great dialogue: that he captures, in a manner rivalled only by Pinter, the rhythms of colloquial speech. But, for me, Mamet's real genius is his understanding of the fear, isolation and fantasy that hermetic male groups camouflage through language of bullish bravado.

The point is confirmed by Lakeboat, an early work getting its European première at London's Lyric Studio. Mamet, drawing on his experiences as a steward on a cargo boat on Lake Michigan, originally wrote the piece for acting students in 1970. He revised it in 1982, but it remains, in essence, his first play, a remarkable, prophetic indication of his poetic gifts as a dramatist.

Lakeboat comprises 28 short scenes, all set aboard a merchant ship plying the Great Lakes. Two threads hold the action together. One is the crew's lurid speculations about a cook, Giugliani, who has failed to make the trip and may been mugged in a bar. The other is the confrontation between Dale, the temporary night-steward studying Eng Lit in Massachusetts, and the dreams and desires of the spiritually-disabled seamen who surround him.

Mamet is not the first dramatist to have capitalised on his cargo-boat experiences, but what makes him different is the way he captures the isolation of these men. They are not even heroic ocean-going mariners — the furthest they get is Canada — yet, as in American Buffalo or Glengarry Glen Ross, they seek to elevate themselves through tough talk.

Mamet constantly shows male chat as a negotiation for advantage. There's a classic example where two guys talk about drink. "Drinking?" says one. "I was drinking before you were wiping your own arse. Beer? I've drunk more beer in my time than I can remember. I could tick off my life in beer caps. Bottles, cans, pop-tops, screw-tops, bottles . . . every man on the ship had his own opener." Under the braggadocio, and the slightly too knowing, Eliotesque allusion to "I've measured out my life in coffee-spoons", lies a wonderful mixture of pathos and bathos — the absurd equation between booze and masculinity, and the notion that a bottle-opener is the supreme piece of nautical equipment.

But Mamet also shows how men, trapped in a boring routine that makes them the floating equivalent of desk clerks, fall prey to fantasy. Preposterously in the way the missing Giugliani is turned into a victim of the Mob or the G-men; touchingly in the way one seaman, Joe, unburdens himself to the student Dale. In much the best scene, Joe, who romantically regards Eng Lit as a "tough racket", suddenly says he would like to have been a dancer. "I saw myself", he says, "arriving at the theatre late doing Swan Lake at the Lyric Opera." This is not an E L Wisty-type joke about a little man who could have been a judge if only he'd had the Latin. It is about a hunger for a life that has dignity and meaning. Like Chekhov's characters, Mamet's express their disappointments through dreams.

In Aaron Mullen's production, this scene is beautifully played by Jim Dunk as the earthy, fantasising Joe, and by Joe May as the watchfully attentive Dale. There is even a touch of homoeroticism about the older man's craving for the younger's approval and affection. The production's one error is in not stressing sufficiently the narrative through-line: the actor who plays the Pierman in the opening scene is so busy doing cigar-chomping realism that we miss a lot of the crucial information about Giugliani.

The odd thing is that the very idea of a "through-line" for story and character was developed by Stanislavsky — admired by Mamet in the past but more recently the target of his verbal firepower. In a new volume of essays about acting, True And False, Mamet claims that Stanislavsky may have been a brilliant director, but "his contribution as a theoretician was that of a dilettante and has, since his day, been a lodestone for the theoretical, I will say the antipractical soul . . . His theories cannot be put into practice."



John Welsh as Fred in David Mamet's Lakeboat PHOTO: NEIL LIBBERT

I suspect that what Mamet is really attacking is the travesty of Stanislavsky's theories by Lee Strasberg's New York Actors' Studio and the narcissism of American Method acting. But Mamet overstates his case. His own work is a living testament to Stanislavsky's basic principles — to the seriousness of art, the importance of truth, the exploration of a work's deeper meaning.

Lakeboat proves the point. The whole work is built on the notion of subtext, through-line and the developing arc of the narrative. Mamet's characters curse, brag, bad-mouth women and exhibit all kinds of male crudity, yet underneath Mamet is saying that they are lost souls reduced by circumstance to a life of hopeless fantasy. Mamet may attack Stanislavsky's ideas, but his own work only makes sense if played with the great Russian's attention to external detail and underlying meaning. He is, in fact, Chekhov's nearest equivalent in modern American drama.

Wings of desire

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

SOMEBODY has already called FairyTale, A True Story a faction, the horrible epithet denoting a fiction based on fact.

The fact is that after the first world war, two young female cousins in the West Yorkshire village of Cottingley produced photographic evidence of fairies cavorting at the bottom of their garden.

These were examined by experts who could find no obvious fakery. It was discovered much later that they were almost certainly fake, though one of the girls, by then an old woman, persisted in claiming that at least one of the photographs was real.

The result at the time was an influx into the village of excited believers, the sceptical and the just plain curious. Most of the visitors wanted the apparent miracle to be true. This was, after all, the era of theosophy, Fatima and The Angel of Mons. It was also a period when almost everybody had lost a close relative in the bloodiest and most attritional of wars.

Charles Sturridge, who made Gulliver's Travels and Brideshead Revisited, takes this odd story, dresses it up handsomely in period, attends carefully to the performances (particularly of the children) and produces a tale about truth and fantasy that is often moving and charming without being twee.

To embellish the tale, he also produces two famous figures out of the hat — Houdini, whose frequently brutal and death-defying escapades many thought magical but were a form of trickery, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, whose Sherlock Holmes seemed so real to many that they fancied him a historical figure. Conan Doyle examined the girls' claims in his book, The Coming Of The Fairies.

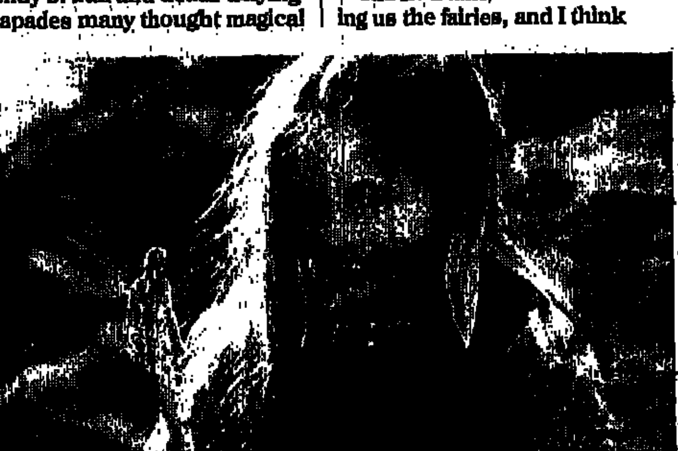
These two are played by Harvey Keitel (an odd but effective piece of casting) and Peter O'Toole, who is a dab hand at almost anything when he sets his mind to it. But Florence Hoath and Elizabeth Earl are as good as anybody in the picture, since they never appear to be acting.

The film takes a risk in showing us the fairies, and I think there's rather too much of them, especially at the end when we are asked to take leave of our doubts for good. It might have been better to leave them in the mind's eye, apart from the photographs. But then this might not have appealed to the children it was clearly partly aimed at.

But only partly, since Sturridge seems determined to push our imaginations further than they usually go. This he does simply by painting the scene so well and, more importantly, by not imposing modern attitudes on the past.

For instance, the parents of one of the girls (played by Paul McGann and Phoebe Nicholls) are grieving over the loss of a beloved son and desperately want to believe the children. That sense of loss, paralleled by Gillies MacKinnon's recent Regeneration, is an integral part of the picture.

Mounted with physical but also psychological conviction, very well shot by Michael Coulter and equipped with a loving score from Zbigniew Preisner, Kieslowski's old collaborator, FairyTale seems a deal more convincing than the recent Photographing Fairies. To be frank, it's the kind of movie you suspect is going to make you wince but turns out to be a pleasure.



There *are* fairies at the bottom of the garden

Journalism into poetry

OPERA
Andrew Clements

BECAUSE British companies have tended to commission their own third-rate operas rather than import proven first-rate new works from overseas, it has taken 10 years for John Adams's Nixon In China, one of the most successful music-theatre pieces of our time, to make it to London.

Peter Sellars's original production, which started in Houston, visited the 1988 Edinburgh Festival for three performances. But only now, as part of the Barbican's Inventing America celebration, has the work finally come south. Only a concert performance, alas, but more than enough to confirm the vivid musical and dramatic strengths of the score, and to make the need for a full London staging even more urgent.

Nixon In China begins as operatic journalism. Alice Goodman's skilful and witty libretto takes the documentary background of Richard Nixon's ground-breaking trip to Beijing to visit Mao Zedong in 1972 as its starting point, but gradually shifts its emphasis.

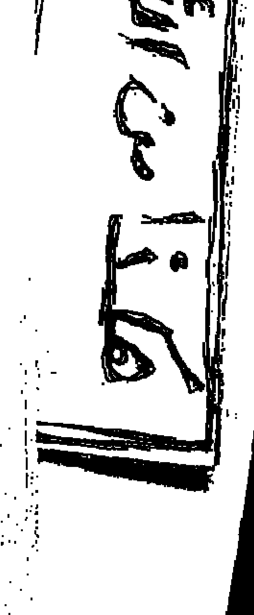
The first act presents the Nixons' arrival in China, his first meeting with Mao, and the exchange of speeches with Chou Enlai at a state banquet in a sequence of ceremonial scenes; in the second the world of the People's Republic is seen through Mrs Nixon's eyes; in the third all pretence at realism drops away, and the main characters — the Nixons, Mao and his wife, Chou and Henry Kissinger — embark on their own sequence of memories and aspirations in a complex and poeticised ensemble.

The dramatic shaping is almost faultless, and the way in which Adams's score underlines and abstracts the essence of each situation is remarkable. The music was written at a time when his style was already shifting — away from the "pure" minimalism with which he had first established himself and towards a language that was far richer both rhythmically and harmonically and more potently expressive.

There are passages, like the gradually-building prelude that begins the opera, that could only have been written by someone who had once been a card-carrying minimalist, and the finale of the first act, with its thrilling choral writing and brass interjections, is founded upon the minimalist blocks. But as the opera progresses and journalism is superseded by psychological conjecture, the music begins to take flight, and the ending, an aria for Chou Enlai, is utterly beguiling.

On one level, Nixon In China is a comedy, a tongue-in-cheek observation of the absurdities of international diplomacy. On another, it is an exploration of the human frailties of those who wield political power. It's funny and touching; it has grandeur and musical excitement — all the ingredients successful operas have always needed.

On stage it would carry even more weight, but this performance, superbly marshalled by Kent Nagano with the London Symphony Orchestra and a cast in which David Wilson Johnson (Chou Enlai), Judith Howarth (Madame Mao), and Wendy Hill (Pat Nixon) were outstanding, amply confirmed the best expectations of this important work.



A crime waiting to happen

Natasha Walter

The House Gun
by Nadine Gordimer
Bloomsbury 294pp £15.99

NADINE GORDIMER has never been a comfortable writer. A fierce writer, a forthright writer, but not a comfortable writer. In some of her most acclaimed novels, such as The Conservationist and None To Accompany Me, she switches without warning from one point of view to another and jumps violently forwards and backwards in time. The style seems to be designed expressly to underscore the lack of control that her characters feel over their own lives. They are in the hands of bigger forces — political injustice, for instance, or unforeseen sexual desire.

The House Gun is more immediately enjoyable than many of her other novels. Partly that's simply because she has concentrated her switchback style on one little narrative that naturally pulls you on and on. This is the tale of a young white South African man, Duncan, who has killed a friend in a fit of passionate jealousy. Many critics have suggested that writers such as Gordimer, who have written so well about the evils of the apartheid system, have lost their subject now that the end of apartheid has come. The House Gun shows us what a facile judgment that is. Gordimer is still writing about individuals who are struggling with forces they cannot control, and her jagged prose finds its way through the new South Africa just as it did through the old.

Her flickering ability to jump from the personal to the political is Gordimer's great strength. The crime at the heart of the novel is a *crime passionnel*. What can be more personal than that? Duncan has killed an old friend of his — with whom he even once had a homosexual affair — after catching him making love to Duncan's own girlfriend. His emotional experiences are brought to us slowly and carefully, fragment by fragment, in conversations between his lawyer and his parents, or between him and his parents, or between his parents alone.

At the same time as she shows us the inexplicable, fragile complexity of one man's life, Gordimer is also at pains to place his crime in a larger context. We gradually learn that Duncan went back into the room where he had seen his girlfriend's infidelity in a state of extreme shock. A gun, the "house gun" of the title, was lying on a table. Duncan snatched it up without forethought, and so a man's life was ended.

At that point three distinct forces crossed: Duncan's previously patient personality, the irrational anger of sexual jealousy, and a bigger political picture that put the gun just there, in that house, on that table. "It was the gun kept in the house so that if someone was attacked, intruders broke in, whoever it was could defend himself." So Gordimer gently suggests that if it wasn't for the legacy of apartheid, which has made South Africa such a volatile and violent society, this particular gun would never have been there, and this crime passionnel could never have happened.

This ability to plunge into the intersection between public and private life defines Gordimer's talent. She doesn't do it to downgrade the richness of private life — on the contrary, you feel that she is warning you about the pressures of the political framework, or the legal system, or social mores, in order to underscore how the individuals caught within them can be hurt and misrepresented. We leave the book with an extraordinary sense of the intransigent unknowability of Duncan's motives, and that throws us back on ourselves, as literature should, and makes us wonder about the judgments we pass on others. This is a memorable novel, that goes on growing in the reader's mind after it has been put down.



Gordimer: a fierce and forthright writer PHOTO: SUE ADLER

If you would like to order this book at the special price of £14, contact CultureShop (see below)

All o' we is one?

Tell the white man he is the devil? Earl Lovelace prefers to call him brother, reports **Maya Jaggi**

EARL LOVELACE was rearing turkeys in Tobago when he first won an award for his fiction, more than 20 years ago. He slaughtered a fowl in honour of the judge, J B Priestley, who dropped in for lunch on the island after bestowing the BP-sponsored award on Lovelace's first novel, While Gods Are Falling.

His most recent novel Salt, a panoramic drama of Caribbean emancipation that won last year's Commonwealth prize, appeared in paperback last month alongside his carnival classic The Dragon Can't Dance.

Unlike his better known compatriots V S Naipaul and the late Sam Selvon (who wrote The Lonely Londoners), Lovelace has spent his life in the islands — one of few major West Indian writers to have defied the lure of the metropolis. Now aged 62, and just visiting, he is adamant that this was the right thing to do: "Coming to London would have ruined me."

In Salt a schoolmaster, Alford George, revolts against a scholarship system that primes its young élite for "escape" abroad. "The sense that the world is elsewhere is imposed on us by our colonial history," says Lovelace. The title alludes to a myth that "Africans, before they had eaten salt, were able to fly back to Africa" — which is why, he says, Rastafarians eschew salt. Opening with a wicked satire on the white man's burden, and spanning three centuries, the novel charts an unfinished battle for freedom among those inexorably rooted in the New World.



Earl Lovelace: 'We can't get nowhere till we settle accounts with history' PHOTOGRAPH: FRANK MARTIN

Lovelace grew up in the capital of Tobago, Port of Spain, and read voraciously "from age three". He worked for a time as a forest ranger. "It began a relationship with the countryside and people of the community, their traditions — bongo, stick-fighting, dancing, songs, tales — which I'd have missed if I just went in a scholastic line. My social life intertwined with theirs. I gambled with the fellars on the corner, danced, played in the football team.

"The justification of colonialism was that they were bringers of light, civilisation, so they had to create darkness. Every African institution was banned when I was growing up: stick-fighting, certain dances, drums, Shango, even Baptists. I began to go into that supposed darkness, and that education was invaluable. I began to see my world more clearly." The Dragon Can't Dance, first published in 1979, probes the obsession with the annual carnival among the shantytown dwellers of Port of Spain. With the African drum banned, the steelband was born, but as "self-affirmation not just entertainment".

"Even now, when people talk about a steelband-man, you know it's not somebody who is simply a musician, it's somebody with a sense of violence about him." The novel hints at the failure of the 1970s Black Power rebellion.

Though he hymns the Caribbean's unique confluence of Europe, Africa and Asia, Lovelace is clear-eyed about racial tensions. An Indian character in The Dragon dreams of a world in which "flute, sitar and steel drum blend harmoniously", but cracks emerge in the glib idea that "all o' we is one". "Indians came with a different cultural vision," says Lovelace. "But while The Dragon tried to show the estrangement of one from the other; Salt shows the need for welcoming each other and moving forward."

In Salt he also delves into French creole characters, and makes an implicit case for reparations — "psychological as much as material" — to heal both grievance and guilt. As one character says: "We can't get nowhere till we settle accounts with history." Yet Salt insists on the humanity of those trapped in the "propaganda of their privilege". "I'm not here to call the white man the devil," says one character, "but to call him to account as a brother."

For the author, one area cries out for redress: "The Caribbean doesn't reproduce images of itself; you don't see yourself working hard, loving and living life; what you see is cinema and TV — mostly American — where the images perpetuate inferiority." That, perhaps, is one role for the novel, and Lovelace creates images of his world and its possibilities in a vibrant and melodious, creolised language. Each character has a say as the story meanders from the first to the third person apparently at will. He explains: "The narrator tells stories as they were told to him, so in retelling, he slips into the first person. We tell stories by impersonating the person we heard them from, so the tale takes on a life of its own. The technique is rooted in the Caribbean way of speaking and telling."

It also accords with his interest in individual selfhood, and ways of resisting its surrender. His fiction endows with joy and a sense of history the lives of people who possess nothing but themselves. As he insists: "Everybody is somebody."

Salt and The Dragon Can't Dance are published by Faber, both at £6.99

Paperbacks

Nicholas Lezard

Flashbacks: Twenty-Five Years of Doonesbury, by G B Trudeau (Andrews & McMeel, £14.99)

IT'S a drag, I know, but you still have to have an idea of America to understand the world. And if you want a one-volume, easy-to-digest history of the last American quarter-century, you couldn't do much better than to get this selection of Doonesbury strips ranging from 1968 to 1995. The early strips are basic indeed: believe it or not, the single strongest influence in its early years, in terms of gag set-ups and timing, is "Peanuts"; but it quickly evolved into a penetrating, sly and unanswerable critique of US politics and mores. What makes this volume especially valuable is the incidental information and quotes provided with the cartoons; for we're isolated over here from the extreme reactions his strips have provoked, and the degree to which people pay attention to him.

Hunting Down the Universe by Michael Hawkins (Abacus, £7.99)

A DISTINCTLY unusual popular science book, in that while it does all the usual things these books do — that is, try patiently to get some very difficult stuff into your head without patronising you — it also gives you an idea of science as not so much a matter of finding pure truth, as of a playground occupied by just the same kind of egomaniacs, power-junkies and cynics as exist in other domains of human achievement.

The true value of this book lies not so much in Hawkins's pet theory (that the missing "dark matter" of the universe is made up of zillions of tiny black holes, with the volume of medicine balls and the mass of Jupiter) as in his application of Wittgenstein's logical rigour to scientific practice: that is, his scorn is reserved chiefly for those who believe the fallacy that "what is unassailable in mathematical physics must represent immutable truths about nature" — and he really doesn't like it when Stephen Hawking goes on about us knowing "the mind of God". Brave lad.

Time Will Darken It by William Maxwell (Harvill, £10.99)

THIS is such a good novel. It was written 50 years ago, and this is its first UK publication. This is the story of Austin King, lawyer in a small mid-western town in 1912 overwhelmed by comparisons with his father, a troubled marriage, and the arrival of kinsfolk from Mississippi. The manners and the way of life described may suggest a lost gentility, but the drama of emotion beneath is timeless, staggeringly well observed.

Long road to enlightenment

Sara Wheeler

The Spiritual Tourist
by Mick Brown
Bloomsbury 309pp £16.99

THE travel writer's arsenal is stocked with spent weapons. A multitude of rusty phrases languish there, from the ubiquitous city of contrasts to our old friend the lunar landscape and that dread place where East meets West. Now that writers have been everywhere, "the inner journey" has fallen among this obsolete battalion of cliché. Publishers parrot that if you want to make a travel book work these days you have to use the external journey as a metaphor for the one rolling on inside your head.

Journalist Mick Brown brazens it out by reversing the standard pattern: in his book, the external journey is merely a byproduct of its inner counterpart. Here he comes, puffing his way round India, the southern United States and the suburbs of north London, doggedly searching for gurus and enlightenment.

Brown is motivated by what he calls the restlessness of self. Although he has no faith, Brown has "come to believe that the world is more of spirit than of matter: that what is unseen is more important than what is seen." He wisely slips in plenty of bathos to keep himself in his place. The touching scene when he feels that God is within him, for example, takes place in an airport terminal. Furthermore, he acknowledges that his quest is hardly original. The various and often dubious manifestations of New Ageism as well as the flowering of eastern philosophies in the West are all "a response to the spiritual vacuum at the heart of modern life, a symptom of the hunger to invest meaning in our lives". None of his material is new, but unlike many authors in the field, Brown succeeds in making it his own: it is a book about his journey.

In the opening two chapters Brown meets various figures in the enlightenment trade in London, one thing leads to another and in chapter three he heads off to India, a place he calls "a prolonged lesson in patience and forbearance".

A parade of spiritual leaders also marches on and off the pages. Brown finds Mother Meera, of whom we have heard so much from Andrew Harvey, now living in German suburbia (darshan with her makes him feel as if he has been smoking a particularly potent strain of grass). Occasionally, the curse of the travel book descends and you get the sense of one damned thing after another. Brown feels rather gloomy in Sai Baba's ashram in Puttaparthi, enjoying himself more in the circle of a 10-year-old Spanish boy who is a rinpoche (incarnate lama). The boy has a Macintosh PowerBook on his desk, and Brown, with an eye for the apposite detail, notes that the screen-saver depicts the Dalai Lama.

When not consorting with living gurus Brown is expounding on the history of dead ones. Amid all this, the book charts Brown's emotional highs and lows as he grapples with the knotty old problem of predestination: is it all part of the Big Plan, or are we simply witnessing "the slips and slides of chance and synchronicity"? Stranded between reason and a craving for faith, he impales himself on the knowledge that "while a spiritual belief may lead you to believe in anything, a materialist outlook in life will lead you to believe in nothing". He badly wants certainty, but it is his doubt that makes the book.

Floundering among spiritual giants and cranks, again and again Brown confronts what he calls the eternal conundrum: how to surrender the ego without surrendering discrimination. He deals with the barking mad Bhagwan (he of the 93 Rolls Royces) with a sane warning about babies and bathwater: "There will always be charlatans ready to exploit the gullible . . . but the fact that some gurus are charlatans does not mean that all gurus are charlatans. And to dismiss all Eastern teachers as deluded fantasists or rank opportunists is the height of folly."

The emotional centre of The Spiritual Tourist is the stirring of Brown's heart: when he glimpses the serenity he craves, and senses some inexplicable yet tangible unity with the world (another writer called it imitations of immortality), the prose takes wing. Like water down the plughole, the feeling always drains away, but as the book draws to a close Brown recognises that transience is part of the truth.

He is a competent stylist, larding his prose with chunks of direct speech to make it more digestible. But he has a weakness for cliché. Drives are hair-raising, phenomena arrive with a vengeance or spread like wildfire and Brown shudders to think. But it doesn't matter. He is an endearing companion on the loneliest road.

Is The Spiritual Tourist a travel book? I think so, but the place that flickers to life is not Pondicherry or Tennessee. It is a dark, shadowy place inside your heart and mine. Can you ask more than that of any book?

Salvation in weakness

Mary Flanagan

The Salesman
by Joseph O'Connor
Secker & Warburg 400pp £9.99

BILLY SWEENEY is writing a letter to his daughter. But Maeve may never read it since she is lying comatose in a Dublin hospital, victim of an assault by four thugs during a petrol station robbery. The letter, which is the substance of Joseph O'Connor's mesmerising third novel, is both a confession and the account of a revenge that goes horribly, farcically wrong.

Billy is a salesman of satellite dishes, an amateur ornithologist and a reformed alcoholic. His name and profession recall that other William, Willy Loman, in Death Of A Salesman. Both are deteriorating middle-aged men, though Billy seeks self-destruction in drink, and his pride in his job is more nineties ironic. "A good salesman knows the things words can do and the things they can't."

Willy has two sons, Billy two daughters. Maeve is his own by his wife, the beautiful Grace; the elder, Lizzie, the offspring of a liaison between Grace and a man she refuses to name. Billy has forgiven Grace's infidelity, married her and accepted Lizzie as his child. But drink is his Nemesis, and soon he is hospitalised in a series of alcoholic traumas. A danger to himself and others, he humiliates and threatens the wife he adores. Furious and heartbroken, Grace leaves with the children. O'Connor is both lyrical and unflinching as he delineates the tenderness and creeping alienation of their marriage, the flashbacks seamlessly integrated into a harrowing tale of pursuit and vengeance.

When Grace acquires a boyfriend, Maeve returns to live with her father in Dalkey where they work out their embattled relationship. Just when they have reached an uneasy peace, Maeve is attacked, remaining unconscious throughout the novel and visited each day by her tormented father. Billy first sees Donal Quinn as he stands in the dock, accused of Maeve's attempted murder. His fierce hatred focuses on the small sinewy young man who moves "quickly, jerkily, like a vicious little winter bird". Quinn escapes, but Billy manages to track him down.

Billy locks the trussed culprit in his disused aviary and contemplates him as he pleads, panics and fakes a spectacular cold turkey. In a savage two-handed drama, victim and torturer swap roles, making each other shit, cry, beg and pray. In punishing the other they punish themselves until we are left wondering which is the real psychotic.

A dose of methadone restores Quinn to satanic form, all malicious wit and manic energy. He shrieks like a wild bird and hangs upside down from his cage like a bat. Billy knows he is powerless to prevent Quinn's eventual escape, yet he cannot save himself by calling the police. Sure enough, within 24 hours he has become the starved, beaten, humiliated prisoner in the aviary. Then suddenly his captor frees him. Proceeding with his reign of terror, Quinn first wrecks then repairs the house, and the adversaries establish a fraught domesticity. If he is Billy's dark half he is also Maeve's shadow, living in her demolished room, wearing her clothes, berating Billy in an echo of her early rebellion. Billy even begins calling him "son". For he is too humane to ignore the complex reality of a living being, too weak to sustain his obsessive hate. "I was seized by the sheer enormity of ending a human life, the awesome finality of stamping out that minuscule speck forever . . . it appalled me." Unlike that other Salesman, his weakness becomes his salvation.

Billy's suffering is resolved in nature and family love, and if that sounds simplistic, it isn't. Coached to expect denial, we are suspicious of grace and forgiveness. But the honesty and bravery of O'Connor's writing make emotions authentic and redemption almost credible.



Methodism in his madness . . . Robert Bolt with Sarah Miles

Writer for all seasons

Michael Billington

Robert Bolt: Scenes From Two Lives
by Adrian Turner
Hutchinson 546pp £20

ADRIAN Turner's enthralling biography of Robert Bolt reads like a movie script. Starting with Bolt's exile on the aptly named Tahitian paradise of Bora Bora to write two Bounty films for David Lean — an exile that led indirectly to a heart attack and massive stroke — Turner then flashes back in time to record Bolt's turbulent private and professional life. But although the constant cutting between letters and interviews gives the book a hurtling pace, Turner poses but never answers the big question. Was Bolt, as his agent Peggy Ramsay believed, a serious dramatist who sold out for "the corruption of the grand hotels"? Or was his academic brother, Sydney, nearer the mark when he said, "I don't believe Bob was an artist, he was a communicator"?

What is certain is that Bolt's life makes a gripping story. The son of a lower-middle-class Sale shopkeeper, he was a schoolboy rebel, undergraduate communist and Devon schoolmaster who, commissioned to write a primary school Nativity play, discovered a flair for dialogue. While teaching at expensive Millfield — where he would rail against his pupils' capitalist parents — he became a prolific radio dramatist and finally struck it rich in 1957 in the West End with Flowering Cherry.

There followed several years of public acclaim — A Man For All Seasons on stage and screen, the movie scripts for Lawrence Of Arabia and Dr Zhivago — and high living accompanied by an agonised private life and fears over his sexuality. Even after his heroic recovery from a stroke in 1979, his life was marked by an extraordinary mix of triumph and tragedy: prodigious output and a contented re-marriage to Sarah Miles were shadowed by the death of a daughter, of his first wife Jo, and the discovery that his and Sarah's son, Tom, was a heroin addict.

On one level, Bolt's life can be read as a medieval morality play: the story of integrity corrupted by wealth and fame with Peggy Ramsay and David Lean representing, respectively, the Good and Bad Angels. Indeed Peter Hall says of Bolt that "he was a working-class boy who made good and was destroyed by market forces". But the truth strikes me as infinitely more complicated than that.

For a start, Bolt was a skilful theatrical craftsman who found his true metier writing movies, rather than a ruined genius. Indeed, one of the few startling misjudgments in Turner's book comes when he claims that "A Man For All Seasons has outlasted not only Brecht's Galileo but Look Back In Anger and The Caretaker". It may be a GCSE set text but it is not in the same league as the plays listed: even Bolt himself called it "bastardised Brecht". One of Bolt's closest friends, the Cambridge academic Roger Gard, was nearer the mark when he said, "What I felt limited his work was its lack of unpredictability."

As I see it, Bolt was more like an Ibsenite hero (say, Borkman or the sculptor Rubek in When We Dead Awaken): the man who sacrifices life to art. His son Tom, happily recovered from his addiction, puts his finger on it when he refers to his own hyperactivity as the "bureau" and says: "My dad had the bureau inside him as well and that's one of the things I share with him." Bolt was the victim less of financial greed than of an ingrained Manchester Methodism and a self-punishing belief in work: it may have saved his life after his debilitating stroke but it also, quite clearly, was the cause of his marital misfortunes. Work was Bolt's own obsessive addiction.

What is striking about Turner's book, however, is its blend of racy readibility and non-judgmental fairness. It presents the likeable Bolt in all his manifold contradictions: not least that of the ardent CND supporter and Old Labour sympathiser who rebelled against punitive taxation. It deals sympathetically with his three wives, leaving us to make up our own minds about the bizarre death of Sarah Miles's infatuated, Gatsbyish publicist, David Whiting, in her Arizona motel room. It is also wryly funny about the egomaniacal monsters of filmland: especially Sam Spiegel who rushed Bolt out of jail, after an anti-bomb protest, on the totally spurious grounds that he was jeopardising the filming of Lawrence of Arabia.

Only one moment chilled my blood: the revelation that Trevor Nunn yearns to make a musical of Ryan's Daughter which he hopes to stage at the National Theatre. Bolt, as this book makes clear, was a complex man and dedicated craftsman: he deserves a better memorial than the middlebrow musicalisation of his most rhetorically overblown screenplay.

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Starlings in the ascendancy

Mark Cocker

THE CREATURE I went to look for recently has enjoyed a highly positive reputation in Europe for millennia. Pliny the Elder knew them as the Birds of Seleucis, and wrote that the inhabitants of Mount Cadmus offered prayers to Jupiter for their arrival because they were known to eat insects harmful to the crops. Unfortunately, my plea was a bit more frivolous. I was praying none of the residents in Sheringham, north Norfolk, would confront me and ask why I was scouring their gardens with binoculars and telescope.

But the bird in question was a rose-coloured starling, a rare Asiatic vagrant to Britain, and it had come to frequent the rooftops, back lawns and flowerbeds which are the classic habitat of its urban relative, the European starling. Fortunately, the bird had taken up territory in one particular garden hedge and soon returned to its favourite perch, where it delivered a song characteristic of the family — a chaotic medley of bizarre gurgles, bill-snapping sounds blended with a subdued warble. Yet, in appearance, it was completely different to its common-or-garden cousin. The back of the head sprouted a luxurious, shaggy, iridescent crest, and its underparts and mantle were a subtle cinnamon colour, which blossoms in spring into a soft rose-petal pink.

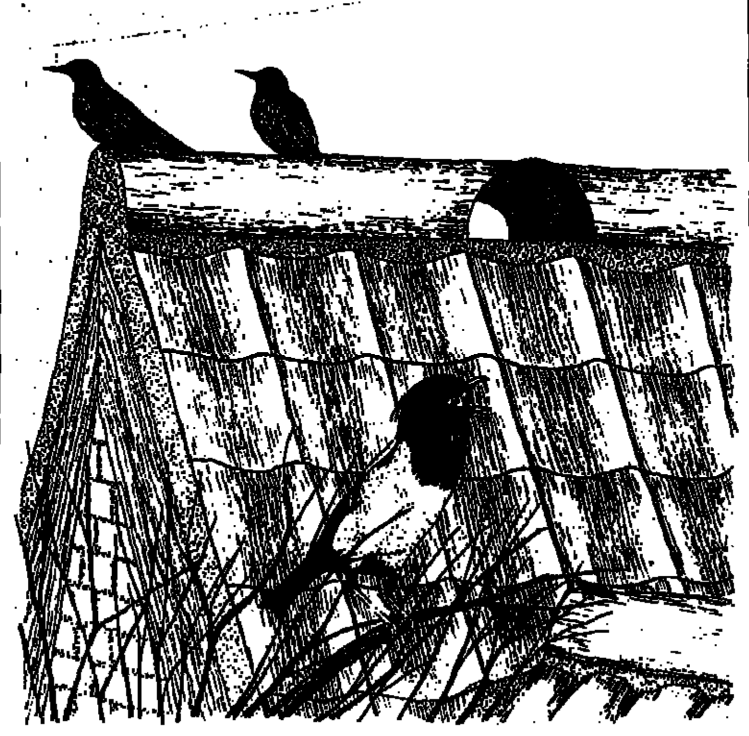
Its favourable status among humans is well founded in fact. Rose-coloured starlings inhabit the steppes of Central Asia, where they pursue a nomadic breeding cycle, following the seasonal abundance of grasshoppers and locusts. Studies in the former Soviet Union show that a flock of just 3,000 birds can consume up to three tonnes of these insects every day, which must help to suppress the build-up of locust swarms. Small wonder that Russians put out over 20 million nest boxes to encourage the starlings to breed.

Sadly, this beneficial reputation is not enjoyed by ordinary European starlings elsewhere. In Continental cities they are frequently reviled for their sheer success and pushy go-getting lifestyle. Civic authorities also disapprove of them because their droppings often whitewash the buildings on which they roost. In the countryside they are widely regarded as a pest. Typical of the extreme measures taken to reduce them was the annual dynamiting of starling roosts in cherry-growing areas of Belgium — explosions that resulted in the deaths of 100,000 birds but which had little impact on their overall numbers.

Last year a group of American friends regaled me with the starling's evil reputation across the Atlantic. Why, they said, had we British brought this unwanted alien to their country? I could see their point. From an original beach-head in the New York area, where about 120 birds were released in the 1890s, starlings have conquered almost the entire North American continent in a single century. The current population, about a third of the world's total, is estimated at a staggering 120 million. Ecologically, starlings now have a detrimental impact on a number of native American birds.

In Arizona, for instance, they oust woodpeckers from their traditional nestholes in the famous candelabra-shaped saguaro cactus. They are also a major agricultural nuisance. Statistics from one large poultry farm indicated that its starling population was consuming more than 1,000 tonnes of feed a year.

While I can understand why my American friends are disturbed at the starling's rapid conquest of their country, there is one aspect of their argument that struck me as a touch unfair. The people who let the evil genie out of the bottle in New York a century ago were not my ancestors — they were my friends' own.


ILLUSTRATION: ANN HOBDAY

Chess Leonard Barden

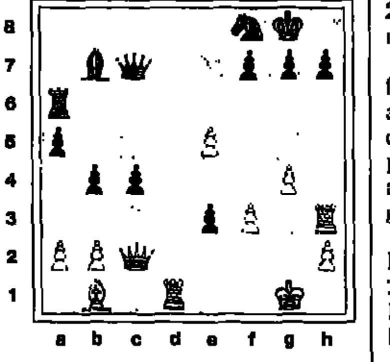
GARRY KASPAROV is still world number one in Fide's 1998 rankings, but Vladimir Kramnik, aged 22, is narrowing the gap, while Fide's own champion, Anatoly Karpov, is back in sixth place. Kasparov has rejected any title unity match against Karpov with an announcement that he plans to accept a challenge this October from the winner of a series between Kramnik and India's world number three Vishy Anand.

The top pair's boycott of Fide's knock-out championship was already bad news for the world body's campaign to gain Olympic status for chess. Juan Samaranch, the chief supporter for chess within the International Olympic Committee, bluntly told the game that it needs a single champion. Since then, Karpov has underlined his lack of credibility with a dismal 3/7 performance in the first half at Wijk aan Zee. Fide and Kasparov are both entrenched in their positions, so a compromise now looks unlikely before the next knock-out championship, scheduled for 1999.

Ex-Soviets dominate the rankings, but Britain's Michael Adams (15th), Nigel Short (22nd) and Matthew Sadler (26th) will all be higher when their performances at the Groningen knock-out are taken into account.

Luke McShane, the UK's future hope, is 16th among juniors aged under 20, but the 14-year-old Londoner is around 100 rating points behind Ruslan Ponomariov, also 14, of Ukraine, who has just broken the record as the youngest-ever grandmaster, set last year by Etienne Bacrot, 15, of France. In the long term, Ponomariov and Bacrot may represent the real threat to Kasparov's supremacy, for both are likely to reach their playing peak as Kasparov hits the wrong side of 40.

No 2511



Vidmar v Teichmann, Carlsbad 1907 — After Teichmann defended by 1 . . . h6, world number two Tarrasch claimed that 1 . . . Qxe5 would have won for Black. Was he right?

No 2510: Bronstein chose the visual 1 Rd8+ Bf8 2 Rxf8+ Kxf8 3 Qb4+ Ke8 4 Rd8+ Kxd8 5 Qf8 mate, but, of course, 1 Rxb7 Rxb3 2 Rxe7 also wins.

Christmas puzzle: (*WK a6, Rs c6,b4, BK a8, Be5, Ps c7, f7, g7, h5, mate in four*): **1 Rc3!! Bxc3** Else 2 Rcb3 forces mate at b8 or by Rb7-a7. **2 Re4 Be5 3 Rxe5** and mate next move.

There were 628 entries, the largest for a Guardian chess competition apart from a puzzle that Bobby Fischer couldn't solve. Competitors reported taking hours over the puzzle, and apart from 1 Rc3, entrants suggested 14 other first moves.

1 Rb5? Bf4 2 Rxh5(2 Rd5 Bg5) Bh6 3 Rd5/e5 Bg5! and **1 Ka5?** Bd4 2 Rxd4 Kb7 and **1 Rb1?** Bg3! 2 Rd1 Bh4 and **1 Rc5?** f6 2 Rcb5 c5! and 1 Rc1? g6 2 Rcb1 e6 3 Rb7 Bb2! and **1 Rb3?** g6 2 Re3 f6 3 Re6 Kb8 and **1 Re4?** Kb8 2 Rxe5 Kc8 and **1 Rb7?** Bd6! 2 Rc3(2,1) c6 3 Rcb3 Bb4 were among the vicious traps which caught out dozens of solvers.

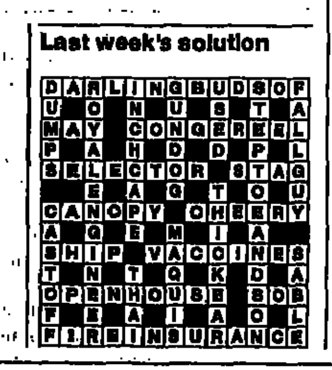
J Holland, from Holt in Norfolk, wins the first prize of £50 and Fritz 5; G Keane, from London, wins £30 and Fritz 5; V Vaganov, from Macclesfield, Cheshire, wins £20 and a year's subscription to Chess Monthly. Winners of the 100 ChessBase Magazine CDs will be notified by Chess Monthly, which will also send every entrant a complimentary magazine.

Quick crossword no. 406

Across
1 Too thin-skinned (13)
8 Break — same here! (4)
9 Picture of person (8)
10 Praiseworthy (10)
12 Viscous (6)
14 Humour with cutting edge (6)
15 Advertisement (10)
19 At top speed (and leaning?) (4-4)
20 Nocturnal insect (4)
21 Herring-pond (World War II slang) (8,5)

Down
2 Esteem highly (8)
3 Swift (5)
4 Ability to share feelings (7)
5 Clean vigorously (5)
6 Great agony (7)
7 Empty (space) (4)
11 A mere cat (anag) — meal (5,3)
13 Part of the ear (7)
14 Doubter (7)
16 Damp (5)
17 Funny (5)
18 Barrel — laughing-stock (4)

Last week's solution



Bridge Zia Mahmood

THIS week, the final three problems from the Christmas competition. Winners will be announced next week.

South	West	North	East
?			

♠AJ108432 ♥K973 ♦2 ♣4

You were asked to rank pass, 1♠ and 3♠. Pass is an option — by coming into the auction later, you can show a long spade suit and a hand that was not strong enough for an opening one-bid or for initial pre-emptive action, which is roughly what you have. Eight points is sub-minimum for any one-level opening, and you "know" never to pre-empt with four cards in the other major suit. But I couldn't bear to pass this hand as dealer; it has potential, and I'd rather land the first blow than listen to opponents who have found they have a huge minor-suit fit. If I weren't vulnerable, I'd open 4♠ and hang the consequences. But I am, so I'll start with 3♠, just, over the aggressive 1♠. As to having four cards in the other major, it often happens that a pre-emptive 3♠ opening bullies opponents into an unsound 4♥ contract, and you'd rather defend that with ♥K973 than with two small. My answer: 3♠, 1♠, pass.

South	West	North	East
	3♣	Pass	Pass
?			

♠AK ♥K732 ♦J9865 ♣A4

Double, 3♦ and 3NT — 3NT is an all-eggs-in-one-basket shot: you may be able to shut West out by ducking the opening club lead, then develop your tricks in peace. And if partner removes 3NT to 4♠, you'll be happier than if he bid 4♠ in response to a double. But if 3NT is wrong, you are probably going a lot down.

A takeout double is a safer bet, though double is unlikely to work if partner bids spades. It's not certain even if he bids hearts or diamonds: do you have enough to raise him, or should you go quietly? Your best shot is a simple 3♦. He may pass when you have a game, but at least you'll get a plus score. And if, over 3♦, partner can introduce a major suit of his own, you'll happily raise him to game. My answer: 3♦, double, 3NT.

South	West	North	East
		1♠	Pass
?			

♠K75 ♥AQ102 ♦J83 ♣A64

2♣, 2♥ and 3NT — this hand is the "standard nightmare" for natural systems: 2♥ shows a five-card suit; 4♠ might be a silly 4-3 fit with 3NT (or 6NT) laydown; 3NT could lose the first six diamond tricks with 11 or 12 easy winners in spades. Tournament pairs agree that a jump to 3NT over an opening bid of one of a major promises a 4-3-3-3 hand.

But this is rubber bridge, where any jump to 3NT is a strong suggestion that partner put down the dummy. There's less chance of ending up in the wrong game if you respond 2♥. Should partner raise you to 4♥ with only three-card support, you may survive. But 2♣ will enable partner to introduce a four-card heart suit of his own, or rebid his spades, or reassure you about the diamonds by bidding that suit. If he raises clubs to the skies, you can always put him back to spades. My answer: 2♣, 2♥, 3NT. ©

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Football

Paul Wilson reveals how Ruud Gullit was booted out of Chelsea in a ruthless game of huff and bluff

Double-crossing at the Bridge

AS THE story of Ruud Gullit's sacking as player-manager at Stamford Bridge dominated the British press last week, the rest of English football was left asking one question. Who the hell do Chelsea think they are? Perhaps that might be refined. Who the hell do the media think Chelsea are?

The London Premiership club are certainly the best news England had all week, as the national team's deficiencies against Chile were swept aside in favour of live satellite broadcasts of Gullit's press conference and page after page of speculation as to what might have happened to cause this rift in the otherwise perfect marriage between showbiz club and show-off coach.

And guess what, it was a sham all along. The tabloids didn't expose it because the legend read better than the reality, and now the dream is over they are blaming Gullit. Chelsea, with their outspoken chairman, Ken Bates, celebrity supporters and their long-established habit of maintaining a higher profile in the gossip columns than the league tables, doubtless enjoy being the back page equivalent of Clinton and Monica. But in football terms, what's the big deal?

Ruthless chairman sacks complacent manager of underachieving [illegible] — it's hardly unprecedented is [illegible]. The money and the personality factor are the story, particularly as Gullit is insisting his eye-watering wage demands of $3 million per year "netto" were not the real reason for his dismissal. There is an interesting side issue about whether top managers deserve more money than top players, and the actual cause of the split was Gullit's insistence on carrying on playing, and picking up a player's contract. "No one can tell me when to finish playing," he said, with some bitterness. Chelsea wanted him just to manage, and it is no accident that Luca Vialli's new contract sets a limit on his period as player-manager.

But the real question is whether Gullit, now linked with a possible move to Feyenoord, is a top manager. Had Chelsea been entirely happy with him they would surely have been more accommodating. Would Gullit actually like the club to spell out their reasons for not favouring him with a contract more than twice the size of those of Alex Ferguson and Kenny Dalglish?

By those managers' standards, Chelsea are certainly under-achieving. Their current position of third flatters them, and has more to do with the well-chronicled deficiencies of Liverpool and Arsenal than any audible breathing down Manchester United's neck. They are still in two cups, but there is also the far from small matter of losing to Arsenal three times this season, the Coca-Cola semi-final first leg defeat being almost wholly due to clangers dropped by Gullit on the pitch, and the ignominy of going five goals down at home to Manchester United in the FA Cup was followed by a dressing room meeting from which the manager was pointedly excluded. To be brutal, Chelsea have rarely been taken seriously with Gullit at the helm. Ken Bates will have been as aware as everyone else that the result which rescued last season, the 4-2 FA Cup win against Liverpool, when Chelsea made an unlikely comeback from a 2-0 deficit, was widely attributed to tactical changes suggested by Graham Rix at half-time.

There are also the stories of growing distance from the players, non-contact with the youth team, and the obvious friction between Gullit's extra-curricular activities in the worlds of fashion and advertising and his increasingly peripheral involvement with actual football. Gullit picked a bad time to try to double his money, and should have known that Bates was not the type to cough up happily.

Once he was hurriedly promoted to the position vacated by Glenn Hoddle in the summer of '96, he simply made it work by the force of his personality, calling in friends and favours from abroad and impressing the locals with his undeniable aura. That was quite a neat trick, but perhaps it was only a trick, for Gullit's personality also led to his downfall. Which is to say, only someone of monumental complacency and self-cocooning arrogance could mistake a situation bordering on a dressing room revolt, and general terrace bewilderment at his selection policy, for a promising moment to ask for a significantly improved contract.

Gullit: too arrogant?

It is clear from his wounded accusation that Bates ditched him "just as I had given Chelsea my word" that he had no idea of the weakness of his bargaining position. "No one will acknowledge why they sacked me," Gullit pouted. "I will have this question mark hanging over me for the rest of my life." Shame. It's called management, Ruud.

Gullit's managerial spell in England was not quite the unqualified success he would have us all believe. Yes, Chelsea and possibly Vialli went behind his back, but double dealing is part of football and Gullit has not done much to earn any loyalty from Vialli.

The image of Gullit the manager we will all retain is the cool dude sitting with his feet up in the dug-out. The mistake we all made was in assuming there was something harder and shrewder behind the image. It is beginning to look as if what we saw was all there was.

Cricket Third Test: West Indies v England

Jittery England edge towards victory

Mike Selvey in Port of Spain

THE rain showers which skittered in from the Maraval Hills wiped out two hours of the final session at Queen's Park Oval on Monday, and at the end of it, the third Test — and with it England's realistic interest in the remainder of the series — was still in the balance.

When bad light stopped play and the fleet of groundsmen, yellow-oilskinned and sou'westered like trawlermen, had hauled the covers on to the playing area for the last time, England, chasing 225 to win and 52 without loss overnight, had slightly recovered, after slipping to 168 for four, and resumed on Tuesday 38 tantalising runs short of victory. Graham Thorpe had 15 and Mark Butcher 11 after a partnership which had somewhat restored England's balance.

All the bad memories of Trinidad Tests — including the one in 1990 when last day lunch-time rain deprived them of probable victory — would without question have been creeping back into the English psyche, but they were expected to win a memorable victory.

For a time, while Mike Atherton and Alec Stewart were continuing their work of the previous evening, and the spark had not ignited in the West Indies attack, the game looked to be England's for the taking. But after the pair had reduced the target to double figures by adding 129 for the first wicket — the fifth time they have reached three figures in Tests together — four wickets fell for the addition of 39 more runs including those of both Atherton, for 49, and Stewart, whose brilliant 83 took exactly five hours.

David Lloyd, to the groundsman's chagrin, had removed the covers himself at 7am to ensure that the pitch had maximum time to breathe. It certainly appeared to do the trick, for instead of playing like a typical Caribbean fourth-day surface, it might have been a first-day pitch, so easily did Atherton and Stewart deal with the bowling.

The previous evening, it had been the captain who had taken on the mantle of run-scorer while Stewart bedded in. The roles reverted to type in the morning session, however, with Stewart playing quite beautifully, driving Walsh through mid-on and then cuffing him through the off-side as if he were a village bobby clipping a scrumper round the ear.

Stewart brought up both his 50 — after three hours' batting — and the century partnership with the same dab to third man and by lunch, they had taken the score on to 122. This may have been England, but victory seemed certain.

The West Indian capacity to fight back is part of their heritage, and the afternoon session saw them begin the process of reeling England in. Lara began to set his fields deep. And slowly, as Ambrose and Walsh cranked up their effort, England began to crack.

Fifteen minutes beyond lunch, after almost four hours, Atherton had gone, caught behind pushing outside off stump. John Crawley could not maintain the momentum. He is struggling to establish his credentials at No 3, and Lara attacked mercilessly. Crawley lasted half an hour before he was senselessly run out attempting a second to cover.

It was the catalyst that started a chain reaction. After playing so fluently, Stewart found his flow of runs drying up. Walsh smelled blood. With his concentration in tatters, Stewart flicked outside off stump, and wicketkeeper David Williams made no mistake.

Thorpe now joined Nasser Hussain, and with each thumping a boundary in a stand of 16, they appeared to have broken the spell. But Hussain must have tripped over a black cat, for the ball he got from Hooper, which might have left a snail's trail in the dust, could not have been played even with a shovel.

Atherton had won the toss and put the opposition in. The West Indies were bowled out for 159 — Fraser and Caddick picking up five wickets each — and then England lost Atherton and Crawley for 22.

The tourists' bad form continued the next day as they failed by 14 runs to reach the West Indies total. The home side started the second innings well, with Lara looking particularly dangerous, but England soon took control, restricting the opposition to 210, Lara falling to Fraser on 47 and Jimmy Adams making the first 50 of the match.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Chile too hot for England

ENGLAND'S preparations for the World Cup were dealt a severe blow when they were beaten 2-0 at Wembley in an international friendly by Chile, one of three South American sides in the finals of the competition in France this summer. Two of three defeats for coach Glenn Hoddle's side have come against countries from that continent, and Colombia ominously share England's World Cup group.

Marcelo Salas scored a goal in each half, first by superbly latching on to a Jose Luis Sierra pass to beat England goalkeeper Nigel Martyn and then hammering home from the penalty spot. Hoddle said afterwards: "We will analyse the performance to see where we can improve. Chile were the better side on the night and deserved the victory."

The match marked the debut of Liverpool sensation Michael Owen, who at 18 years and 59 days, became England's youngest international this century, beating the record held by Busby Babe Duncan Edwards, whose England career started in 1955 when he was 18 years and 183 days. Owen passed the test with first-class honours, acquitting himself well enough to be designated man of the match. The teenager was disappointed by what a football wit branded "Chile con carnage" and said: "It was good to get my debut, but the result spoiled it."

CANADIAN snow boarder Ross Rebagliati can keep the gold medal he won at the Winter Olympics in Nagano despite testing positive for marijuana after winning the slalom event. He was reprieved by the International Olympic Committee's arbitration panel just a day after the result of the original positive test was announced. The amount of metabolised cannabis shown in the sample was too small and Rebagliati maintained that he was a victim of passive smoking. However, the ruling was overturned on the grounds of an apparent flaw in the International Ski Federation rules that mean a cannabis limit cannot be applied to snow boarders.

THE first cricket Test between South Africa and Pakistan in Johannesburg was delayed for a day to give two of the visiting team's players time to recover from an attack by muggers. Mohammed Akram and Saqlain Mushtaq received minor injuries in the attack. The match proved memorable for South Africa's Pat Symcox, who scored his first Test century and, with Mark Boucher, added 195 for the ninth wicket — a Test record, beating the 190 put on by Asif Iqbal and Intikhab Alam for Pakistan against England at The Oval in 1967.

HOGAN "KID" BASSEY, Nigeria's first world boxing champion, has died in Lagos, aged 65. Bassey, a clean fighter, pummelled his opponent, Cherif Hamia, forcing the referee to stop the featherweight fight in Paris in 1957. He successfully defended his world title against Ricardo Morena in Los Angeles. Thereafter most of his fights were in the United States. In 1959 he returned to Nigeria to become national boxing coach.

Football results

FA Cup fifth round: Arsenal 0, Crystal Palace 0, Aston Villa 0, Coventry City 1; Leeds United 3, Birmingham City 2; Manchester Utd 1, Barnsley 1; Newcastle Utd 1, Tranmere Rovers 0; West Ham Utd 2, Blackburn Rovers 2; Wimbledon 1, Wolves 1.

FA Carling Premiership: Everton 1, Derby County 2; Sheffield Wed 3, Liverpool 3.
Leading positions: 1, Manchester Utd (played 25, points 50); 2, Liverpool (26-46); 3, Chelsea (25-45)

Nationwide League: Division One: Crewe 3, Portsmth 1; Ipswich 5, Huddersfld 1; Man City 0, Bury 1; Middlesbro 1, Bradford 0; Port Vale 2, Norwich 2; Stockport 1, Stoke 0; WBA 1, QPR 1.
Leading positions: 1, Middlesborough (31-62); 2, Nottingham Forest (30-60); 3, Sunderland (29-56)

Division Two: Blackpool 3, Millwall 0; Bournemth 2, Chesterfld 0; Brentford 0, Preston 0; Bristol City 0, Gillingham 2; Carlisle 1, Walsall 1; Northmptn 3, Southend 1; Oldham 1, Fulham 0; Plymouth 0, York 0; Watford 1, Luton 1; Wigan 0, Grimsby 2; Wrexham 1, Bristol R 0; Wycombe 2, Burnley 1.
Leading positions: 1, Watford (31-65); 2, Bristol City (32-61); 3, Northampton (32-51)

Division Three: Barnet 2, Cardiff 2; Brighton 0, Doncaster 0; Darlington 0, Notts Co 2; Hartlepool 0, Chester 0; Macclesfld 1, Leyton Orient 0; Rotherham 0, Shrewsbry 1; Scarboro 4, Exeter 1; Sc'thorpe 2, Rochdale 0; Swansea 0, Peterboro 1; Torquay 5, Hull 1.
Leading positions: 1, Notts County (32-69); 2, Peterborough (32-55); 3, Macclesfield (32-55)

Tennents Scottish Cup fourth round: Ayr 2, Kilmarnk 0; Dundee U 1, Inverness CT 1; Dunfermline 1, Celtic 2; Hearts 3, Albion 0; Motherwell 2, Rangers 2; Raith 1, Falkirk 3; Ross Co 1, Dundee 1; St Johnstone 3, Stirling A 1.

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE:
Premier Division:
Leading positions: 1, Rangers (24-49); 2, Celtic (24-49); 3, Hearts (24-49)

First Division: Morton 3, Hamilton 1.
Leading positions: 1, Dundee (24-47); 2, Raith (24-42); 3, Falkirk (24-40)

Second Division: Clydebank 0, Stranraer 1; East Fife 1, Queen of Sth 5.
Leading positions: 1, Clydebank (23-44); 2, Livingston (21-38); 3, Queen of the South (23-35)

Third Division: Berwick 0, Cowdenbeath 2; Queens Park 0, Montrose 2.
Leading positions: 1, Alloa (22-43); 2, Arbroath (23-40); 3, Ross County (22-39)